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# Batik: A Process and a Means of Progress

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Batik: A Process and a Means of Progress

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## **Dedication**

The contents of this ISP are dedicated to five wonderful women with whom I had the amazing opportunity of sharing my experiences in Senegal. These specific artists, musicians, dancers, anthropologists, and explorers greatly shaped my personal growth and happiness while abroad. They saw the countless hours dedicated to my project, and they were along for the ride with me all the way. For that, I am forever grateful.

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## Abstract

I chose an alternative ISP of doing batik because it incorporated all of the facets of my interests: anthropology, international development, and art. As an artist, creating my own batik satisfied my love for expressing how I see the world through art. As an anthropologist, I was able to gain insight on a new culture. As an international activist, I was able to explore how batik can be used as a mechanism to improve the quality of life for people in Senegal. While my project was all encompassing, the primary objective of my research was to gain an understanding of the techniques and process of making batik. I accomplished this by taking formal batik lessons. The other component of my research was to narrow the broad subject of batik through a focus on how art can be used as an empowerment tool. For the purpose of my paper, empowerment is defined as having reliable economic opportunities that can be used to enhance the quality of life for people in Senegal. My objective in doing so was to explore how art can provide opportunities for work and the economic means to better one's way of life. I accomplished this by conducting interviews only with other batik artists and arts empowerment groups in Senegal.

This ISP concluded in the creation of four batik *tableaux* and a multiplicity of smaller pieces. The process of making batik also made me reevaluate how I work as an artist and inspired me to let the batik flow naturally from my creative core. Finally, as a means of empowerment, the final results of my research showed that *l'art du batik*<sup>1</sup> is a less successful means of generating income than petit *artisanats*<sup>2</sup> who make batik for the sole purpose of selling.

SIT topic codes: 101, 106, 204

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<sup>1</sup> The art of batik. This refers to batik created for the sole purpose of being art for art's sake, and often entails multiple colors and intricate images.

<sup>2</sup> Craftsmen. This type of batik is more simplistic and easily reproducible for mass vending.

## **Introduction**

Batik is a prominent art form in Senegalese culture despite its origins outside of West Africa. There is no consensus on the exact site where batik first emerged, and there is even some speculation that the method of fabric dyeing commenced in multiple locations independently. However, despite some debate on how and where batik emerged, Indonesia is typically accredited for the development of batik because historically it was “the area where batik reached the greatest peak of accomplishment” (Batik Guild 2011). As for Senegal, there has been a long history of “resist dyeing using cassava and rice paste” (Batik Guild 2011) in a process comparable to batik.

With the advent of modern technology there have been some changes to batik techniques used in Senegal. Now, the chemicals hydrosulfide is used to make the *teinture*<sup>3</sup> stick permanently to the fabric while soude caustique is used to help spread the color equally (Lawson 11/4/2011; Mbaye 2). Further changing traditional techniques, paraffin wax mixed with bee’s wax are now used instead of traditional pastes to prevent dyeing in designated areas. Furthermore, techniques have been adapted and combined with other forms of fabric dyeing. For example, “*teinture* traditional,” otherwise known as tie-dye has been used in a new form of batik called “soupa kandji,” or “gumbo” batik that is a mélange of tie-dye and batik techniques (Lawson 11/4/2011; Loum 2/5/2011). The main difference between tie-dye and batik fabric dyeing techniques is the wax. In order to make batik correctly wax needs to be used in the process. In fact, if wax is not used, it cannot correctly be labeled as batik art (Lawson 11/4/2011).

A batik artist can create the desired pattern or image on a piece of fabric by using wax and dye. The wax fuses with the fabric to create an impermeable seal and thus stops any area under the wax from soaking in color. In particular, the bee’s wax makes the bond between fabric and wax strong and resistant to leakage during multiple dye-baths (Lawson 11/4/2011). The tint of the batik is determined by the dye

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<sup>3</sup> Dye

bath in which it is submerged for a length of time which can be adjusted depending on the desired color saturation. When the wax is removed, using water and the possible addition of solvents, the contrast of dyed and untouched fabric etches out the lines and textures of the design. This process is repeated to create layers of color which shape complex images.

In the context of Senegal, batik plays an interesting role as an art form, a practical fabric, and also a means of work for many citizens. Senegalese fabric is world-renown for its intricacy, quality, and design. Every experience I've encountered while abroad has been surrounded by beautiful, vibrant *boubous*<sup>4</sup> that color the landscape. The *boubous* that are made from handmade batik fabric stand out in the crowd, and are seen as prestigious in the local culture. While batik fabric is an art whether it is a tableau hanging on a wall or wrapped around as a skirt, a crucial component to its significance in Senegal is that it provides jobs.

Unemployment in Senegal is a substantial problem. As of 2007 the unemployment rate was considerably high at 48% (CIA 2011, Index Mundi). Fortunately, art can provide a means of work and income. In this sense, batik would be used to empower people by giving them the means to better their ways of living. Money earned could be used on nutrition, health, and education to name just a few aspects of life that would be more accessible. Currently, there has been little information gathered on how the Senegalese art form of batik can be used as a means to attain better standards of living. While this concept has been explored in other countries through arts empowerment organizations, there is inadequate information on how batik and empowerment are correlated for Senegal.

In Senegal, the empowerment of women through means of economic autonomy is important. Earning money can facilitate improvements in life style because it gives people the chance to dream and develop their own lives. It also encourages active participation and has to ability “donner le pouvoir aux

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<sup>4</sup> Traditional Senegalese outfits

gens<sup>5</sup>” to create change in their own lives (Doucouré 22/4/2011). As Khadija Douvouré from Centre Africain de L’Entrepreneuriat Féminin<sup>6</sup> told me in an interview, “Il y a des gens au Sénégal qui utilisent le batik comme un moyen économique pour bien vivre ; une source de revenue économique [et] une activité pour [générer de] l’argent<sup>7</sup>” (22/4/2011). Khadija works to provide the financial needs, education, and mentoring necessary to develop entrepreneurial projects for the women in Senegal. From her personal experiences with empowering women she believes “le pouvoir économique [est] une condition nécessaire pour permettre la femme de lutter contre la pauvreté<sup>8</sup>” (22/4/2011). It is necessary to make a woman’s voice heard in the economic sphere of a country. Not only would this be beneficial for the woman, but also for future generations and the country as a whole. For example, “si les femmes restent dans la pauvreté, les enfants aussi restent dans la pauvreté parce qu’ils n’ont pas la chance de bien manger, d’être bien éduqués, ou d’avoir des opportunités. Donc il faut créer quelque chose pour les femmes<sup>9</sup>” in Senegal (Doucouré 22/4/2011).

As an anthropology and international development double major at my home institute, combined with my personal passion for art, I found it to be all encompassing to explore how local culture, expressed through the arts, can be used as a means of development and progress for the people and their country. I used Senegal as a specific case study and I worked in the capital of Dakar. For my formal lessons on creating batik, I worked on the SIT campus in Point E. This site already had a few of the amenities that I needed to make batik such as running water and clothes lines, and it provided a safe and theft free environment for my art. I carefully chose Dakar because there is not only a bustling art community, but also ample organizations that wish to capitalize on artists to aid progress.

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<sup>5</sup> To give the power to the people

<sup>6</sup> African Centre for Women’s Entrepreneurship, CAEF

<sup>7</sup> There are people in Senegal who use batik as an economic means to live well; a source of income (and) an activity for (generating) money

<sup>8</sup> Economic power (is) a necessary condition to allow women to fight against poverty

<sup>9</sup> If women remain in poverty, (their) children also remain in poverty because they do not have the chance to eat well, to be well educated, or to have opportunities. Thus, we have to create something for the women.

## Batik Terms and Process Defined

The first step in the batik process is to create a design on the fabric with wax. Any area that is covered with wax will remain that color on the tableau. If the wax is too hot it will spread thinly on the fabric and blur into areas that were not desired. If the wax is too cold it will not adhere properly to the fabric. One must practice to achieve the perfect temperature for their own personal art style. After the image is completed the tissue is submerged in a dye bath in order to change the color of any fabric surface that is exposed. A dye bath is comprised of powder *teinture*, hot water, cold water, and the chemicals hydrosulfide and soude caustiue. Once submerged in the dye it is necessary to remove, re-submerge, and turn over the fabric multiple times to ensure equal contact with the dye over the entire surface. After the *tissu* rested in the dye bath for about a minute it is immediately removed and placed in the rinse bucket of water to remove any excess chemicals from the dye bath. Then the fabric is hung up on a clothes line in the sun where it will change to the true color of the dye and also dry. After the fabric is dry this process can be repeated with as many dye baths as desired by the artist. It is important to note, however, that there is a rule regarding the order of dye colors that can be used successively in order to them to appear successfully. One must start with "la couleur la plus claire [et ensuite continuer avec les couleurs les] plus foncées"<sup>10</sup> (Diore 30/4/2011).

After the *tableau* has been completed with each layer of dye it is necessary to remove the wax from the tissue. This is done by melting the wax off of the fabric surface. In order to make this happen, a big basin of water should be boiled. Usually this is done over an open fire pit, but other means of heating the water would suffice. Then, the fabric with wax is submerged into the hot water and quickly pulled out until the wax drips off completely. One can alternate between the hot water basin and a room temperature basin where the fabric can be rubbed together, in a motion similar to washing cloth by hand, in order to remove larger pieces of wax. After all of the wax is removed, the batik *tableau* is complete and ready for all eyes to behold it.

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<sup>10</sup> The lightest color (and then continue with the colors) that are darker

There are four main techniques of applying wax to a batik tableau: dessin avec un pinceau, craquelé, pointillé, et marquage au tampon<sup>11</sup> (Mbaye 2). Directly drawing on the fabric with a brush is comparable to painting because the area that the brush, or sponge, goes over remains the color of the dyed fabric. To achieve the *craquelé* look the entire surface of the tissue needs to be covered with searing hot wax. After two or three layers of wax, it will be thick enough to effectively be crumpled in order to create a pleasing look of spontaneous cracks. To maintain and protect these cracks during the following dye bath, another layer of really hot wax needs to be put over the entire cracked surface. This can be done as many times as desired, but after the 3<sup>rd</sup> color of cracking it is not necessary to scrunch the fabric beforehand because the cracking will result easily enough when submerged in the dye bath. To create the look of dotted *pointillé* a bundle of straw—usually used to sweep in Senegal—can be submerged in the wax until it gets hot. Then the baton can be flicked above the fabric to get the effect of droplets (Diore 30/4/2011; Maimouna 2/5/2011). Finally, stamping with *tampons* can create a nice pattern on batik fabric. First the stamp needs to be prepared in the hot wax. This is done by letting the stamp sit in the wax until it is hot enough to soak into the wood. After, the *tampon* can be gently pressed on the fabric. It is necessary to remove the stamp fast to limit sticking and excessive spreading of wax (Diore 30/4/2011; Maimouna 2/5/2011; Lawson 2/5/2011). For *l'art du batik* all four techniques are often used. This creates the complexity and intricacy desired for an art tableau and the results can be astounding.

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<sup>11</sup> Drawing with a brush, cracking, dotting, and marking with stamps.

## Learning Goals

While I started out thinking my project would be a traditional research paper, I soon discovered that what I had in mind was not feasible for a month long timeline. Instead, at the onset, I was attempting to write two different ISPs; one was a month long exploration of doing batik art myself, and the other being research on how art can be used as empowerment in Senegal. Once I acknowledged my limitation, it was necessary to reformulate the focus of my project. At this point in my research I had already finished a week's worth of formal batik lessons, and my new passion and curiosity for the art form was evident. I decided to make my exploration with batik an alternative ISP, where I would work on improving my competence with the material over the course of the month. However, I couldn't let the idea of art as empowerment completely fall to the weigh side. I wanted to help women across the globe, and I want to do it through art. In this sense, I arrived at the final formula for my research: the majority of my research was an alternative project where I developed my personal practice of batik, and I only conducted a minor focus of batik as empowerment when I went out into the field to conduct interviews. The women and men I interviewed were a mix of batik artists, social activists, and organizations that used art to advance the ways of life in Senegal.

The breadth of my research encompassed many goals. For my personal creation of batik, I first and foremost wanted to have a comprehensive understanding of how to do batik and to become proficient with the major techniques. I wanted to become competent in each step of the batik process so that I could effectively do it on my own. I also had many smaller goals, including creating a full sized tableau of batik with one meter by two meter dimensions. Further, I aspired to try out new methods of applying the wax, such as using found materials to create textures and patterns. I also wanted to use the art medium as a means of exploring my experiences in Senegal. This included an exploration of themes in Senegalese culture in the depictions on my fabric, as well as expressing my reactions to these findings in the batik I created.

As far as my field research, I sought to interview batik artists in Senegal in order to have an understanding of how other artists do batik and how that compared to my personal exploration. I sought to speak mainly with women. I also wanted to conduct interviews with organizations that used art to provide jobs, and thus economic autonomy, to the people in Senegal as a means of bettering their way of life. I wanted to discover what types of batik can be used to effectively empower people. This component required that I explore how *l'art du batik* compares to batik done by *artisanats*.

## Methods

My primary methodology of researching how to do batik was through formal art lessons with Fola Lawson, a batik artist and painter who works at Village des Arts in Dakar. Fola not only acted as my teacher, but he also proved as a mentor and the advisor of my project. Over forty-five hours that comprised six sessions, Fola was able to teach me the process and techniques of batik. This was my jumpstart to becoming a batik artist myself. After my lessons with Fola I continued to work on batik by myself. I maintained the same weekly number of hours that I had conducted with Fola to ensure that I would make ample progress on my *tableaux* during my multi-hour batik sessions. It was personal exploration, participant observation, and physical participation with batik. The knowledge I gained about batik gave me an element of commonality with Senegalese artists and empowerment organizations whom I sought out next.

I conducted eight interviews with a mix of batik artists and organizations that empower the people of Senegal through art. Not only did my participation in batik make me more accessible to the artists and effectively gave me an upper hand in my role as a researcher, it also made me more comfortable when going the interviews. My lessons made me familiar with all of the terminologies and processes of doing batik, and this aided how I could understand and participate in the interviews. Learning batik transformed my project from merely being one researcher using foreign organizations and artists to gain knowledge, into a discussion and complex exploration between two artists, or two activists, as they sought to utilize their shared passions to enhance lives.

## Resources

In my interviews, I gave a voice to Senegalese batik artists and organizations that strive to give opportunities through art. I conducted my first interview with Khadija Doucouré because I was familiar with her organization from a Field Study Seminar she held at SIT. Khadija's organization, CAEF, strives to empower the women of Senegal by mentoring, educating, and providing the means of work. Since this organization is based on aiding many grass-roots projects to create work for women, I knew it would be a good place to start, and a valuable resource for getting in contact with women batik artists and art empowerment organizations in Senegal. This "networking" was essential to finding interviews and contacts.

From the onset, Khadija set me up with a woman that she had worked with in order to start an all-female batik school in Touba. Fatou "Nene" Loum soon became a valuable resource for my project and, *inshallah*<sup>12</sup>, we will cross paths once again to combine our shared passions of art and empowerment. When I asked her why she wanted to create a school for only women she replied "pourquoi pas?"<sup>13</sup> (Loum 2/5/2011). During our time together Nene showed me a variety of dying techniques that surpassed the techniques of batik that I had learned with Fola. I was immediately enthralled and wished that I could have worked with her to learn "toutes les teintures" that her students learn in Touba, such as "le batik, la broderie, la teinture, [et] la couture"<sup>14</sup> (Loum 2/5/2011). Nene proved to be a very valuable resource for she encompassed the two facets of my project in one high-spirited, laughing bundle.

Other organizations based around aiding women were also important tools to gain connections with women artists in Dakar. The Dakar Women's Group (DWG) is an organization that strives to create an environment to support the endeavors of women in Senegal and "is dedicated to giving back to the

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<sup>12</sup> God willing

<sup>13</sup> Why not?

<sup>14</sup> All dyes... batik, embroidery, dyeing, (and) sewing

community” (Durand 24/4/2011). During an interview with the Art Co-chair of the DWG, Ximena Durand, it was explained that the “main goal [of the organization] is to empower women... and [to] do it through art” (24/4/2011). While the DWG is by definition a networking group, they also have a charitable aspect where they raise funds annually to support project around Senegal. This includes promoting artists and their work as a means of income, and thus proved a good connection to batik artists in Dakar. Like CAEF, the DWG wants “to make an impact that is sustainable, and not give a little bit of money here and there, and [so they] do monitoring throughout the year...so [they] can continue to provide the help [and] the financing... if it’s really actually doing something for the community” (Durand 24/4/2011). Although interviewing and speaking with these organizations allowed me to start a network of batik artists and art empowerment groups, I also relied on archival research to find other subjects to interview for my project.

Keur Marie Gannar was a boutique in Mermoz that also provided a valuable resource for me during the ISP. This shop was started by and named after Marie Pooul, an arts activist in Dakar that gave artists in her community an outlet for gaining recognition and economic revenue. She started an “expo for artisans in her house,” and soon the program expanded to a boutique that functions “as a co-op [and displays] all types of arts” (Durand 24/4/2011). This location provided me with many quick contacts to artists who displayed their batik at the shop. Often times the artists themselves were present at the store because the space also functioned as a workshop. This was crucial for obtaining interviews as well as personal connections that enhanced my network of subjects.

## **Difficulties Encountered and the Resulting Discoveries: A Tale of Four *Tableaux***

As an artist I have always striven to make the image in my head become a reality. I want to express how I see the world through a blend of colors and an array of images. Before coming to Senegal, my experience with different art mediums was vast, but I always found myself getting the most joy out of painting. While I would draw with acrylics in the States the new possibility of being able to draw with dye was a temptation I found in batik.

During my ISP I created four large *tableaux* that were each two meters by one meter in dimension. This first was a woman playing the tama, titled Tama Tantrum, and the second was an image of two elephants, titled Elaborate Elephants. The third was a Senegalese woman carrying a calabash on her head, titled Tough Tête<sup>15</sup>, and the final piece was a map of the world, titled World Whomp<sup>16</sup>. In each project I sought to utilize the four main techniques of batik that I learned from Fola, but they ended up entailing much more. Each tableau presented its own unique difficulties with the batik medium. These challenges were something I had to overcome in order to advance my art, and I ended up learning just as much about myself as an artist as I learned about the art during the process.

### **Tama Tantrum**

My first full sized tableau was the woman playing the tama. I was inspired to create an image that reflected the traditional music I had learned during my time abroad. Further, I was interested in drawing a woman with flowing whips of hair because of its aesthetic components and my own personal reflections of the cultured differences of hair between America and Senegal. My hair has always been long, slippery, and straight. Interestingly, during my time in Senegal, I found myself feeling like an outsider due to my hair that was very different from the mesh *tresses*<sup>17</sup> I encountered in my host family. As a means of

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<sup>15</sup> Head

<sup>16</sup> See appendix for photos

<sup>17</sup> Braids

integrating myself into the culture I chose to get long *tresses*, and they sat atop my head during the whole month of ISP. It was partially due to the nostalgia I had for my real hair, as well as my fascination with how much cultural importance can be attributed to hair that I decided to create a woman with wild, luscious locks.

The first difficulty I encountered involved the depiction of a human subject. I was concerned with how to create a skin tone that was interesting and not an overpowering color. At the same time, I wanted to create definition in the face, while not taking away from the features. The solution I devised was to create shading with each of the layers of dye adding a new depth to the dimensions of the skin. The bright colors, such as yellow, would be the highlights on the face, with the later layers of color, such as the blue, being the shadows.

I soon learned that while this task was easy to imagine in my head, it was hard to do in reality. In order to keep the yellow where it needed to be to highlight the face, I needed to have the forethought of how the face would appear in the end. I didn't want to make with wax on the yellow layer—which would keep the area under the wax yellow forever—where there should be lowlights and blue shadows. This technique took much practice, and I think it was most successfully applied on the arm holding the drum baton.

While the foresight for the shading of the woman was successful, my desire to “look ahead” and envision exactly how the end product would look did not always go as planned. According to my plan, blue and purple would be the fourth and fifth dye colors used respectively. However, in batik, the colors that result from a dye bath are always a surprise. Many times the surprises do not go in favor of what was expected, but this time, the blue that resulted for this tableau was a wonderful surprise. When I was finished with the fourth layer of dye I was so pleased with the blue that appeared that I changed my plan to have a purple background. However, because I was planning all along on using a dark purple to create shading on my woman, there would have been spaces left unfinished if I had stopped with blue as the

final layer. Instead, I reformulated my plan for the tableau. I would still dunk the *tissu*<sup>18</sup> in purple to create the lowlights, but I would first cover the entire background except for a small outline of the image with wax in order to preserve the blue background and to create a dark purple shadow to make my image really pop out. This whole experience ended successfully, and it taught me that while some forethought is necessary to do batik, it is not always possible to plan ahead exactly. Batik requires the artist to be flexible and adapt to what results may appear.

### Elaborate Elephants

The second tableau I created was an image of two elephants. I was inspired to use elephants as my depiction because they are an animal that I have always associated with Africa, even though I have had no interaction with them physically while on the continent. Further, the image proved ideal because they are an icon that can be embellished with small details. Like my advisor, I had the desire to “faire les petit décorations<sup>19</sup>” in my batik *tableau* (Lawson 2/5/2011). This concept was ideal because batik can be quite ornate and I wanted to try creating small colorful designs with the wax. It was during the process of making this tableau, however, when I discovered that batik can be quite finicky. The temperamental *teinture*<sup>20</sup> had a mind of its own, and the resulting colors of my tableau were often not as I had expected.

For example, when I was creating my elephant tableau, I first put the blank fabric in a yellow dye, for these areas would act as the highlights of the image. Next, I created a light turquoise dye bath, and I tested this color on a blank melican<sup>21</sup> *tissu*. Pleased with the color, I quickly submerged my yellow elephant tableau. When I pulled out the two-meter fabric and hung it on the clothes line, I was surprised at how different the color was from the test fabric. Instead of turning the fabric the light turquoise, the tableau was a bright green.<sup>22</sup> The blue in the dye bath was greatly affected by the previous layer of yellow

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<sup>18</sup> Fabric

<sup>19</sup> To make small details

<sup>20</sup> dye

<sup>21</sup> 100% cotton fabric that is slightly off-white in its natural form

<sup>22</sup> Appendix photo 1

*teinture*. Had the big tableau been the natural color of the melican, then the touquoise would have resulted, but instead, the yellow and tourquoise mixed and greated the green dye that I ended up with. This proved very frustrating, and somewhat scary, for me. After putting in many hours of work drawing my images in wax, I absolutely did not want to risk submerging the *tissu* in an unpleasing color. However unexpected, the resulting color was still beautiful, and the whole process taught me a valuable lesson: the colors used actually layer upon each other and have an effect on the result of later colors.

### Tough Tête

My experience with the elephant tablua intrigued me to explore this aspect of batik art, so decided to do a project to discover a bit more about how order of colors affects their resulting appearance. I decided to create one large tableau made of three individual pieces. I would use the same four dye baths for the entire piece, but I would change the order of the dyes for each section of the triad. I chose the image of a Senegalese woman with a basket on her head because it was a sight I had grown accustoed to both in Dakar and during the village stays. Further, this was a good image to choose because each section—the head, *boubou* torso, and *pagne*<sup>23</sup>—would be visually exciting and a good surface for beautiful batik details. Further, the colors I chose to use were inspired by my experiences with the enviroment of Senegal during the dry season: yellow, orange, green, and blue.

Since I had chosen colors, such as orange and green, that might affect each other in distasteful ways such as creating a mucky brown, I once again desired to test out my dye colors before suberging the tableau that I put a lot of work into. However, these test strips differed from the ones I used before because I better learned the properties of batik and I new that in order to accurately test the way the 4<sup>th</sup> color would look, it would have to have been submerged in the three previous dyes.

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<sup>23</sup> A *pagne* is the wrap skirt portion of a Senegalese woman's *boubou*, which is a traditional outfit

For the first step in the process of making this tableau I created the four dye basins and tested the colors for each third of the tableau in the order that they would appear<sup>24</sup>. I chose yellow to be the first color dye for each of the three pieces because I had learned from my previous experiences that the light yellow would not show up after the fabric had already been submerged in dark dyes. Thus, since I wanted to have highlights on all three pieces it was necessary to start with yellow, and after I could change the color order as I saw fit.

The first difficulty I encountered with this project was obtaining colors that were visually pleasing. The test strips made it evident that this would be a hard task to accomplish. While the first few colors were vibrant and beautiful, the third and fourth dyes were often very similar shades of grimy green. I figured I could overcome this challenge by changing the length of time I let the fabric sit in the dye in order to make each color stand out more prominently from the others. A downside to this change, however, would result in the test stripes being inaccurate. I would base the change in length of time off of how I wanted the colors to be different from the colors the test strips showed. This was a successful aspect of using the tester strips because I was able to see ahead of time the results without ruining the tableaux I had spent hours waxing.

After all of my planning to attempt to control the art medium I was using I was ready to get to work on my woman. I worked on the three parts of the woman tableau at the same time, and the first two layers of dye went according to plan. I had spent one days worth of work drawing the image and carving out the first two colors and was pleased with all that I had accomplished. The next day was a different story. When I continued the tableau the following day I was immediately confronted with a variety of problems. The most evident thing was that the quality of th dye baths severely diminished when it is not used

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<sup>24</sup> The order of colors used for each third of the tableau:

	1 <sup>st</sup> dye	2 <sup>nd</sup> dye	3 <sup>rd</sup> dye	4 <sup>th</sup> dye
Head	Yellow	Orange	Green	Blue
Torso	Yellow	Orange	Blue	Green
Pagne	Yellow	Green	Orange	Blue

right away. It was not the same quality after one day, and even worse after two. Because I let the dye sit out over night it did not soak into the fabric in the same way or richness that it would have if I had used it the day before. Instead, the dye left a grainy texture on the fabric where some splotches took on more color than others. Unfortunately, because of the time consuming property of batik, it was unavoidable to have the project span over a few days time.

I had to create new basins of dye. Luckily I remembered roughly how I had created the previous dyes, and what ratio of each color *teinture* went into them. Therefore, I tried to recreate the same dyes from the night before. This was the second factor that made the test strips of color inaccurate. This also technically affected the overall goal of my project, which involved using the same four *teintures*, and those *teintures* only.

Although the majority of the project did not go according to my plan I learned many things from the process and overall experience. I learned that no matter how much I try to control and predict the outcome of my batik, it is a futile aspiration. In fact, it is better for me to accept the beauty as is surfaces magically from the medium. There is little I can do to ensure the outcome of my *tableaux* because there are too many variables: the length of time the fabric stays in the dye, the temperature of the dye, the ratio of hydrosulfide to soude caustique, and the succession of colors to name just a few. There will always be the risk of a resulting color that is unexpected and unaesthetic, and this is especially pertinent to the third or fourth layer of color used on the tableau. However this is something a batik artist needs to be able to adapt to, and it is essential to work with any mistakes that appear (Lawson 2/5/2011). Importantly, I had my first encounter with a crucial property of the *teinture* baths and I learned that they don't last, and this was especially pertinent to keep in mind when doing a project that takes a few days.

By the third week of my ISP period I had already learned many valuable lessons about the process and medium of batik. This was largely a result of the accumulation of all the difficulties I encountered in my previous works. I wanted to create one final tableau using all of my recently acquired

knowledge of batik, and my new laissez-faire attitude about batik. Fola continuously told me, “je suis très libre<sup>25</sup>” when doing his art, and I wanted to personally embody this concept in my art (2/5/2011). I wanted mostly to let the art just flow out of my without trying to manipulate my medium as I had fought so hard to do in the past. My new mindset was to stop protesting the true process of batik and just accept its properties.

### World Whomp

The tableau I had envisioned for my new attitude as a batik artist was a map of the world. I have always been really intrigued by the shape of the continents and how they correspond in position to one another. Also, I have always been aware of my misconceptions of how the world looks. If I were asked to draw the continent of North America I would be able to envision the United States and Mexico but I could not envision the entire outline or shape. Further, I have an irrational idea of how big one continent compares to the others. This fact was extremely prominent when I first tried to draw a complete map of the world. America was too large, Europe and Asia were too small, and almost every continent was in an inaccurate place. On the one hand, as an anthropologist, I made the map of the world as a means to address that the way we view the world is only a figment of our personal cultured experiences. As a batik artist on the other, I made the map because it was a flexible surface where I could experiment with powerful visual sensations through color and movement.

To start my tableau I created a yellow dye bath to make the highlight on my continents. I made the yellow *teinture* in the same fashion as I always did and submerged the *tissu* into the tinted water. After putting the piece up on the clothesline I was taken aback by the color that resulted. Instead of the yellow I had made, the color was a very bright yellow-green. It occurred to me that somehow the basin I used was tainted with the slightest bit of blue from a previous dye bath. This minimal addition of blue dye remnants changed the *teinture* drastically. Instead of seeing this as a complication in the process of my tableau I

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<sup>25</sup> I am very free

took a moment and realized that I found the color to actually be acceptable and even beautiful. This was the first instance where I realized just how much my mentality on doing batik changed. Instead of being upset that things did not go as I had planned I accepted the surprise of batik and learned how to incorporate the change fruitfully into my image.

While I had a new outlook on what comprised a mistake and what was just an unexpected surprise, it did not stop me from encountering other difficulties with the world tableau. I had drawn the small abstract details of the ocean in pencil directly on the fabric so that I would know where to cover with wax. However, I learned that once the fabric is submerged in dye the pencil markings are extremely hard to see. Luckily I learned this immediately after my first dye bath of yellow-green. Because the color was so light I was about to recover most of my pencil markings and remark them in pen which would last better through another dye bath. Not only was drawing the small designs ineffective when they could not withstand the dye, but they also required a lot of time. I had to draw the first time in pencil, then in pen, and finally in wax. It only took me one time through this whole process to realize that it would have been a lot more time efficient if I drew abstractly directly with the *pinceau*<sup>26</sup> on the *tissu* with wax.

Throughout the entire month of ISP I encountered many challenges and as a result I gained new knowledge about the art medium. With each tableau I learned something new, and I continue to gain insight on how to better my batik art. Most importantly, I now know that batik needs flexibility. It is necessary for the artist to think ahead but at the same time it is hard to predict the outcomes with batik. This same sentiment was expressed by many of the batik artists I interviewed. Dib Camara noted that “le batik est différent à chaque fois<sup>27</sup>” (23/4/2011). You need to constantly be reformulating. Therefore, I learned that I need to take my batik one step at a time. Planning ahead overtly is not effective because batik is in many ways hard to control. Furthermore, as an artist I learned that it is necessary to relax when

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<sup>26</sup> Brush or sponge to apply wax

<sup>27</sup> Batik is different every time.

I make art and then it will simply flow out of me. When I applied this new mindset to my batik, for example with the world tableau, the end result was extremely successful.

Interestingly, during my month of batik I was very aware of my role as a participant in the learning process. I found that I produced art that I was proud of much faster than I have ever been capable of. I attribute this greatly to the Senegalese teaching style I experienced from Fola. After the first three days of lessons I had already learned the main concepts I needed to make my own batik art. This was a positive outcome made possible because of Fola's trust in my artistic capability from the beginning. I jumped into doing batik from day one, and I was expected to perform from the very beginning. This was an important lesson that I kept in mind while doing my interviews with other Senegalese batik artists and empowerment organizations. It was constantly at the back of my mind that if I could learn batik in such a short amount of time that it was extremely feasible to teach batik to Senegalese women as a means of providing economic opportunities.

### **Difficulties Encountered and the Resulting Discoveries: Art as Empowerment**

Throughout my research, I have discovered that batik as a tool for empowerment is not how I envisioned it. *L'art du batik* as empowerment might not be as feasible as I wanted it to be. This is because batik is very expensive, and time consuming, and the amount of work going into *batik d'art* may not be profitable enough to give women the economic empowerment I sought out (Camara 23/4/2011; Lawson 2/5/2011). In fact, more simplistic batik made for the purpose of selling might prove to be a more reliable source of steady income. Thus, I learned that I should turn my focus to batik *artisanat* to make the concept of art empowerment more realistic.

Further, in my research I was also surprised to find out that batik might not have the same cultural significance in Senegal as I had expected from the onset. While there is a local market for batik it is much smaller than the international market, such as in France and the United States, for vending batik *tableaux*. Also interestingly, I did not find a consensus between my interviewees regarding the cultural importance

of batik in Senegal, and this division was based on gender. One interviewee explained that “tout le monde aime le batik. C’est pour les femmes, enfants, et pour les autres ; tout le monde peut porter ça. C’est pour les nappes de table, les draps. Le batik est partout !<sup>28</sup>” (Loum 2/5/2011). Similarly, batik *tissu* is important “pour les fêtes et autres cérémonies<sup>29</sup>” (Soxnassy 2/5/2011). While the women seemed to view batik as an important component of Senegalese culture, the men saw it otherwise. Fola explained that “les gens ne s’intéressent pas vraiment [avec batik ici, et] il n’y a pas une culture d’esthétique pour les gens. La plupart du temps, les gens sont influencé par l’Occident... il y a beaucoup de gens qui n’ont pas les yeux purs [et] ils n’ont pas le sens ou la valeur de ce que les artistes [du batik] ont fait<sup>30</sup>” (2/5/2011). This concept was reiterated during another interview where I learned that batik is “juste pour décorer” and it is possible to wear batik as clothing “mais c’est pas dans la culture<sup>31</sup>” of Senegal (Diore 30/4/2011).

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<sup>28</sup> Everyone loves batik. It is for women, children, and for others; everyone can wear it. It's for tablecloths, sheets. Batik is everywhere !

<sup>29</sup> For parties and other celebrations

<sup>30</sup> People are not truly interested (in batik here, and) there is not a culture of aesthetics for the people. Most of the time, people are influenced by the West ... there are many people who copy what they see (and) they have no understanding or value of what (batik) artists have done

<sup>31</sup> Just for decoration...but it is not in the culture.

## **Recommendations for Future**

While I thought that I had successfully made my project into one cohesive study of batik with a research focus on batik as empowerment, by the end of the ISP period I realized that all of the information I had uncovered was still too much for one ISP. It was, effectively, enough for two separate research topics: one being merely learning and exploring the art of batik, and the other being how art can be used to give Senegalese people opportunities to advance their lives. That being said, even though the two topics are related, I would recommend that each topic comprise a unique ISP. This would allow future projects to go into more depth while still maintaining the one month timeline. I ran into this problem when I tried to tackle both topics at the same time; by the end of my research I felt like I had barely scratched the surface and that I had made many valuable connections with both batik artists and empowerment groups but was unable to utilize them each fully. While this was not what I had envisioned, the project was still an overall success because I hope to use art as a means to better the standards of living across the globe in my future career. This project gave me the first glimpse of how this is possible.

Furthermore, for this project to flourish in the future it is necessary to note some cultural and ethical considerations that I discovered during my ISP. As Ximena Durand put it, an organization “should be culturally appropriated” in order to be sustainable and successful (24/4/2011). In the context of Senegal, it is very important for a woman “to balance her social life and her professional life” because an imbalance has the possibility to create “une source de problèmes dans la maison et avec le mari<sup>32</sup>” (Doucouré 22/4/2011). Because a woman’s economic endeavors change her time management and often takes away from the time that used to be allotted for her family and husband, Khadija Doucouré believes “[il faut] préparer le mari, ça c’est important. Ce n’est pas la permission, mais presque<sup>33</sup>” (22/4/2011). This

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<sup>32</sup> A source of problems in the house and with her husband

<sup>33</sup>(one must) prepare the husband, that’s important. It is not permission, but almost.

is a result of “la réalité socio-culturelle<sup>34</sup>” of Senegalese culture where the husband is expected to give all that the woman needs to her (Doucouré 22/4/2011). Thus, if she seeks work outside of the home, it may appear to outsiders and family members that the husband is not providing well enough, and this is hard for the husband. This cultural context of Senegal could potentially have a negative effect on my research to empower women through art.

Additionally, one major goal of my ISP was to explore how batik can empower women in Senegal, and while I did start to uncover the depths of this topic, there is still a lot of room for improvement. In the future I hope to work with only women batik artists and women empowerment organizations. Unfortunately this was not the case for my ISP since I also relied heavily on the input of men. This project was very hands on with many men, including my male batik teacher and various male interviewees. While this proved a successful way to start my research, I want to better represent the voice of women batik artists in Senegal and I can do this in the future by only incorporating women.

As for my future endeavors with making more batik art, I hope to continue to make mistakes and gain insight on how to advance my art from one piece to the next. Further, in a broader sense of my growth as an artist, I hope to put my new mindset of just letting the art flow out of me toward the other types of art I do such as painting. With some persistence, this “Senegalese mindset” of doing art can result in major self improvements as an artist in general. Overall, in the future I hope to combine all that I have learned in my ISP to gain an all encompassing skill for a future in empowering women through art on an international level.

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<sup>34</sup> The socio-cultural reality

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