

Tie-dye: Folded, Stitched, Coloured

The focus of the exhibition ‘Tie-dye: Folded, Stitched, Coloured’ at the Museum der Kulturen Basel is on the patterning technique of tie-dye. In great detail it reveals how, step by step, patterns are created by tying, stitching or folding fabric. The show is based on the museum’s extensive textile collection.

How did the flowers find their way onto the kimono, and the parrots onto the blouse? How does one arrange circles on cloths in such geometric perfection? Who conjured up the raindrops, the weeping willows, the waves, the spider’s webs, or an entire sunrise on some of the fabrics on display? In the new exhibition ‘Tie-dye: Folded, Stitched, Coloured’ you get to learn how these fascinating patterns are created with the help of a variety of techniques. Step by step, you can follow how fabrics are crafted into works of art by folding, tying, stitching or compressing.

The technique of tie-dye is extensively documented in the Museum der Kulturen Basel’s textile collection. This allows to showcase the production processes involved down to the last detail – based on the textiles themselves as well as the tools and materials required. The various tie-dye techniques are presented and explained across seven stations. Japanese shibori is probably one of the best-known techniques; others include plangi, bāndhanī, tritik and adire which are practised in Asia, South America, Europe, and Africa, respectively. They also highlight the global nature of the museum’s textile collection.

‘The special thing about tie-dye is its three-dimensional element,’ says the curator Stephanie Lovász. ‘Before dyeing, a fabric is moulded into three dimensions. In some cases, this is only a temporary step, in others, the fabrics retain their three-dimensional form.’ This is all explained at a dedicated station.

According to the curator, craftsmanship is at the core of the exhibition: ‘To this day, tie-dye is all about handicraft. Nothing is done quickly, everything takes time. Moreover, it also requires a great deal of experience, knowledge, imagination, skill, and a little maths.’

Appreciating Craftsmanship

The patterns are also rich in symbolism. The five-point pattern on the hem of a skirt from India promises good fortune. The diamond shapes on a veil from Yemen resembling eyes are believed to protect the woman wearing it from harm, while the circular patterns on a Tunisian headscarf – described as mirrors – are said to ward off the evil eye. The blue-and-white stripes on a Japanese kimono are believed to have a pleasant cooling effect.

What’s more, tie-dye never goes out of fashion: a Spanish T-shirt worked in the plangi mode, which was first sold at Globus in the 1960s, experienced a revival at the raves of the 1990s. In 2025, the carnival clique Déja Vü designed their costumes including the head masks using the classic Japanese itajime fold-and-clamp-resist method and wore them at the famous Basel carnival parade.

Something New, Regularly

The exhibition's catwalk doesn't feature glamorous models in luxury designer wear, but ornately patterned pieces of clothing instead. In order to do justice to the diversity of patterns and wealth of motifs found in tie-dye techniques, selected exhibits and installations are changed approximately every six months. This means it might be worth visiting the exhibition more than once.

The exhibition offers inspiration for one's own style of dress, while above all fostering a renewed appreciation of the men and women involved in the work and the craft itself. To underpin this, visitors get the chance to try many of the things out for themselves at a special hands-on station.

Installation by Marie Schumann

Throughout the duration of the exhibition, the site-specific installation Sequences, Screens by the textile artist Marie Schumann is on display in the stairwell. As in tie-dye, here too the fabric attains a three-dimensional shape as it unfolds from floor to floor, evolving from flat to sculptural and inviting viewers to experience it from different angles.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum der Kulturen Basel is hosting the 12th International Shibori [Symposium](#). From 25 to 27 September, experts from around the world will gather in Basel to discuss various topics under the theme 'Textile & Architecture: The Art of Dimensional Transformation.'

The 'Tie-dye' exhibition will run from 4 September 2026 through 23 January 2028. Images are available for downloading at our [website](#).