

## ***Crafts, professions of excellence***

### **NATURAL TEXTILES**

#### **Related professional – Aurore Pelisson Workshop: Saint-Rémy-de-Provence**

Beginning in prehistory, the natural fibres have served man's textile needs for thousands of years. France has a long and rich history of natural textile production, dating back centuries. In the Middle Ages, France was known for producing high-quality woollen textiles, and by the 17th century, silk production had become a major industry in the country.

One of the most famous natural textiles produced in France is linen. Linen production in France dates back to the Roman era, and by the Middle Ages, it had become a major industry. Linen production was particularly important in the northern region of Normandy, which still produces some of the finest linen in the world today.

Cotton production in France began in the 16th century, but it wasn't until the 18th century that it became a major industry. The city of Marseille became a center for cotton production and trade, and by the 19th century, France was one of the largest cotton producers in Europe.

Silk production in France dates back to the 16th century, when King Francis I invited Italian silk weavers to France to teach their craft. By the 17th century, silk production had become a major industry in Lyon, and the city became known as the silk capital of the world. Today, Lyon is still a major centre for silk production in France.

In addition to these natural textiles, France is also known for its production of wool, cashmere, and mohair. Many French fashion houses use these natural fibers in their collections, and they are highly valued for their quality and beauty.

In recent years, there has been a growing shift in France towards ethical and sustainable textiles, as consumers become more aware of the impact of the fashion industry on the environment and workers.

Fast fashion, which refers to the mass production of cheap clothing that is designed to be worn for a short period of time before being discarded, has been criticized for its negative impact on the environment, including the use of toxic chemicals, water pollution, and waste.

As a result, there has been a growing demand for more ethical and sustainable fashion in France. Many French fashion brands have responded to this demand by adopting more sustainable practices, such as using organic cotton and other natural fibers, reducing waste, and implementing fair labour practices.

In addition, there has been a growing interest in the use of recycled and upcycled materials in fashion. Many French designers are incorporating recycled materials into their collections, such as using vintage fabrics and repurposing materials that would otherwise be discarded.

There has also been a growing interest in local and artisanal production in France, with many consumers seeking out locally made products that are produced using traditional techniques and sustainable materials.

## What are the skills and expertise of professionals in this profession?

Natural textile artists need a combination of technical skills, creativity, and attention to detail in order to create beautiful and unique textiles using natural materials and techniques. Some of the key skills include:

- **Knowledge of natural fibers:** Natural textile artists need to be knowledgeable about a wide range of natural fibers, such as cotton, silk, wool, linen, and hemp. They need to understand the properties of each fiber, such as its strength, durability, and texture, and how it can be used to create different types of textiles.
- **Textile techniques:** Natural textile artists need to be skilled in different techniques based on their specialisation and be able to use these techniques to create different textures, patterns, and designs.
- **Dyeing and printing:** Natural textile artists also need to be skilled in dyeing and printing techniques, such as natural dyeing, screen printing, and block printing. They need to be able to create different colours and patterns on their textiles using natural dyes and pigments.
- **Design:** Natural textile artists need to be able to develop their own unique designs and patterns for their work. They need to be able to translate their ideas into sketches and plans, and then create the finished textile using their chosen techniques.



- **Attention to detail:** Natural textile artists need to have a keen eye for detail, as even small imperfections can affect the quality of their work. They need to be able to work carefully and precisely, and be willing to put in the time and effort needed to create high-quality textiles.

- **Creativity:** Natural textile artists need to be creative and imaginative, as they are often working with limited materials and techniques. They need to be able to come up with innovative solutions and designs that showcase their skills and artistic vision.

- **Patience and focus:** Patience is an important quality for artists to have, as the creative process often requires a significant amount of time, effort, and dedication. It allows them to persevere through challenges and setbacks, and ultimately achieve their artistic goals. Artists also need focus in order to achieve their creative goals and produce high-quality work.

*(Photo: Aurore Pelisson – design process)*

## What are the specific tools used in this craft?

Other than common objects such as **pots, bowls, ladles and stirring spoons**, the artist we have interviewed uses screen printing to produce her artworks.



*(Photo: Aurore Pelisson –using natural textile dyes)*

**Screen printing** (also known as serigraphy) is a printing technique that involves using a mesh screen to transfer ink onto a surface. The screen is prepared by coating it with a photosensitive emulsion, which is then exposed to light through a stencil or image. The areas that are exposed to light become hardened, while the unexposed areas remain soft and can be washed away with water.

Once the screen has been prepared, it is placed over the surface that is being printed, such as a T-shirt or canvas. Ink is then poured onto the screen and a squeegee is used to press the ink through the mesh and onto the surface. The ink adheres to the surface in the areas that were not blocked by the stencil, creating a printed image.

Screen printing can be used to print on a variety of surfaces, including paper, fabric, metal, and plastic. It is a versatile and durable printing technique, and is often used for printing large quantities of posters, T-shirts, and other items.

Screen printing can also be done by hand, just like in case of the artist we have interviewed. As she describes, hand printing allows for more flexibility and creativity in the printing process.

## What materials are used in this craft? Are they local materials?

Natural textiles can be made from a wide variety of natural materials, each with their own unique properties and characteristics. By using natural materials, natural textile artists are able to create textiles that are not only beautiful and functional, but also sustainable and environmentally friendly. The most frequently used fabrics include:

- **Cotton:** Cotton is one of the most commonly used materials in natural textiles. It is a soft, breathable, and durable material that is widely available and easy to work with.
- **Wool:** Wool is another popular material for natural textiles. It is warm, insulating, and has a natural elasticity that makes it ideal for knitting and weaving.
- **Silk:** Silk is a luxurious material that is often used for high-end natural textiles. It is soft, shiny, and has a natural drape that makes it ideal for creating elegant and flowing fabrics.
- **Linen:** Linen is a strong and durable material that is often used for natural textiles such as tablecloths, napkins, and clothing. It has a natural texture and is highly absorbent, making it ideal for use in hot climates.
- **Hemp:** Hemp is a strong and durable material that is often used for natural textiles such as rope, twine, and canvas. It is highly sustainable and requires very little water or pesticides to grow.

Artists use natural fabric dyes to create patterns and colours and distinguish themselves as artists. Natural fabric dyes are a great alternative to synthetic dyes, as they are more environmentally friendly and sustainable. They also often produce unique and beautiful colours that cannot be replicated with synthetic dyes. Natural fabrics include:

- *Indigo:* Indigo is a plant-based dye that is often used to create shades of blue. It has been used for thousands of years and is still a popular dyeing option today.
- *Madder root:* Madder root is a plant-based dye that is used to create shades of red, pink, and orange. It has been used for centuries and was once a popular dyeing material in Europe.
- *Turmeric:* Turmeric is a yellow dye that is made from the root of the turmeric plant. It is a popular natural dyeing material in India and other parts of Asia.
- *Black walnut:* Black walnut is a brown dye that is made from the hulls of black walnuts. It is a popular natural dyeing material in North America.
- *Onion skins:* Onion skins are a yellow-orange dye that is made from the outer skins of onions. They are a popular natural dyeing material in many parts of the world.

## What markets are related to this profession?



**Ethical fashion & accessories:** Natural textiles have a long history in fashion, and are often associated with high-quality, sustainable, and ethical fashion practices. Many natural textiles, such as cotton, wool, silk, and linen, are biodegradable, which makes them a more environmentally friendly option than synthetic textiles, which are often made from non-renewable resources and can take hundreds of years to decompose.

*(Photo: Aurore Pelisson – samples of natural textiles)*

Natural textiles have a timeless and classic aesthetic that is often associated with luxury and sophistication. They are often used in high-end fashion designs and can add a touch of elegance and sophistication to any outfit.

Artists producing natural textiles often provide a higher quality compared to synthetic textiles, with superior durability, breathability, and comfort. These items are also more versatile, and can be used in a wide range of fashion styles and applications.

**Interior design:** Natural textiles play an important role in interior design, and are often used by designers and homeowners who value sustainability, comfort, and aesthetic appeal in their homes. They are often used in interior design to create a warm, inviting, and natural feel in a space. Natural textiles, such as cotton, wool, and linen, are often used in soft furnishings such as cushions, blankets, and curtains, to add comfort and warmth to a space. These materials are soft, breathable, and durable, making them ideal for use in high-traffic areas. Natural textiles have a timeless and classic aesthetic that can add a sense of warmth and natural beauty to a space. They can be used in a variety of design styles, from rustic and traditional to modern and minimalist.

**Cinematography:** Natural textiles are often used in cinematography to create a sense of authenticity and realism in film productions. They are often used in costume design to create a sense of authenticity and historical accuracy. For example, period films may use natural textiles such as silk, cotton, and wool to create costumes that are historically accurate and visually striking. They can also be used in set design to create a sense of warmth, texture, and authenticity. For example, a rustic cabin scene may use natural textiles such as burlap, linen, and cotton to create a sense of natural beauty and authenticity. Natural textiles can be used in sound design to create sound effects. For example, the sound of a rustling silk gown or the creaking of an old woollen coat can add a sense of realism and texture to a scene. Finally, such textiles can be used to manipulate lighting and create visual effects. For example, a silk scarf or fabric panel can be used to diffuse light and create a soft, romantic glow in a scene.

## Where to learn this profession in France?

There are several institutions in France that offer programs in natural textiles. The most popular educational institutions for young people interested in (natural) textiles and fashion design include:

- *ENSCI - Les Ateliers*: The École nationale supérieure de création industrielle (ENSCI), also known as Les Ateliers, offers a Master's program in Textile Design that covers natural textiles. The program is focused on experimental and innovative design, and students have access to a range of workshops and equipment to develop their skills.
- *École Duperré*: The École Duperré is a public art and design school in Paris that offers a Bachelor's program in Textile and Surface Design. The program covers a range of textile techniques, including natural dyeing and weaving, and students have the opportunity to work with natural materials like wool, silk, and cotton.
- *L'École des Arts Décoratifs*: L'École des Arts Décoratifs is a prestigious art and design school in Paris that offers a Textile Design program. The program covers a range of textile techniques, including natural dyeing, and students have access to a range of workshops and equipment to develop their skills.
- *LISAA Nantes*: LISAA Nantes is a private art and design school in Nantes. One of its parts is École d'Architecture d'intérieur, Design, Graphisme et Mode which offers various programmes in textile and fashion design. These programmes cover a range of textile techniques, including natural dyeing and weaving, and students have the opportunity to work with natural materials like wool, silk, and linen.

<https://www.lisaa.com/fr/ecole/arts-appliques-nantes>

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**Sources:**

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