

## BLUE-EYED BOY

*Maku's downright devotion to indigo*



Many cultures, lifestyles and tastes from across the world are interacting with each other more than ever, and because of this a focus on local diversity is in jeopardy. Going against the fast fashion sentiment of the West, a story is being written near the Far-East shore of India by a brand called Maku. In our world of multiple choice, Maku strives to safeguard local diversity, historic textile practices and inherent craft knowledge by deciding to promote clothes in a single colour: indigo.

Maku was founded by Santanu Das in 2011 after working at a wall cover design company in New York. There, he began to look for an alternative meaning of luxury in the form of indigenous craft. He tells Selvedge, 'I wanted to work with handwoven fabrics especially, as industrialisation has, I think, killed the art of weaving.' He attended the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, where he won the prestigious Italian Valcellina Award. This prize is given to an artist under the age of 30 for innovative uses of textiles, and he won it for a 30ft installation, *A Narrow Strip of Mind*, made with old jamdani saris and abla mirror work.

In the beginning, he travelled almost 2000km to Bengal to buy saris in bulk from rural weavers, then showing the clothes he made in Chennai, Goa and Mumbai. Before long he found it impossible to work from so far away, and moved to Calcutta. There are now 100 weavers working for Santanu. Drawing on their knowledge he makes jamdani fabrics, keeping the craft alive and believing that as India's textile traditions disappear, with them may vanish family histories preserved in the fabrics.

Maku uses the techniques of Bengal and brings them to an international audience. Working with khadi, muslin and jamdani, Santanu makes a bold statement by promoting one colour. When asked why, he replies, 'apart from being one of the ancient Indian dyes, and Bengal having a long association with it, indigo takes on a different character in different fabrics.' He also says that it's because it's organic; 'like human beings it ages, decays and dies, adding to the fabric's character.' From over 40 species of Indigofera, archeologists have found traces as far back as 5000 years in India.

Despite the limitation of using a single colour, each collection is different from the next; the garments emphasise the richness and versatility of indigo, from the palest powder blue to black. With this palette Maku makes clothes in Indian silhouettes, attractive to Western tastes. With finely pin-tucked dresses, jamdani scarves, whisper fine saris and gingham lined duster coats, the clothes are now finding a global audience. In 2016, Maku took part in the Festival International des Textiles Extra Ordinaires in France, celebrating textile heritage and cultural significance. Maku has also found homes in Japan and Taiwan: as Santanu says, 'Japan's our biggest market, they prefer our simple aesthetic and organic quality.' Donna Karan and ABC Home in New York are also fans, and Maku fabric has been made into clothes for Sansa Stark in *Game of Thrones*, available at The Cloth House and The Chapel Collection. Santanu's dream is to make clothes more sustainable, and to have a store that sells garments in only one colour: indigo. \*\*\* **Amanda Oliver**

