



Cochineal

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Cochineal has been used for centuries by the native people of Mexico and been used to create stunning reds, purples and pinks on a number of different materials. When Spain took over Central and most of South America the industry was monopolized by the Spanish government, leaving the world at the mercy of them for the best red the world had ever seen.

Now creating a "Perfect Red" is no easy task, it takes hours of soaking and patience, and time is something we don't have readily in class. So we settled for making some purples, pinks and grays. But we didn't just dye our yarn with cochineal, we took it a step further and experimented with mordants and modifiers.

A mordant is usually a metal that the fiber is pre-treated (chemically) with and acts as a bridge or linker to attach the dye to. Some dyes and fibers need mordants for the dye to stick, but in the case of Cochineal it is not needed. We used mordants to further affect the color of Cochineal and allow the yarn to be more permanently dyed. A modifier is something that the fiber is treated with (soaked in) after it has been dyed. These affect the color and depending on what you use will brighten, darken or completely change the color.

Above are pictures of the end result of dyeing yarn. In groups we each chose a different combination of mordant and modifier to create a different color. Then when each had dyed their yarn we split them into four and shared them equally. This "Eye of God" has yarn that all used tin as a Mordant, so it is the modifiers that affected the colors the most.

Nowadays, Cochineal isn't used to quite the extent that it was throughout the Renaissance and Enlightenment period. Because of synthetic dyes Cochineal has lost most of its appeal. It is still used, in food dyes and in smaller cases as a dye for cloth, but its scope compared to its spectacular beginnings through Spanish influence is sadly almost insignificant.

One has to admit, that now, even in our modern age, color is vitally important to our culture and we take for granted the humble beginnings of what we see around us. Working with cochineal in class was awesome and I really learned to appreciate the colors of the world around me.

