

## In Memoria – Michele Wipplinger

Every now and then someone comes along who makes a big impact on the way we think about our earth. Michele Wipplinger was one of those people. She had a passion for colour and textiles which propelled her life's journey. She was an author, educator, master dyer, traveller, photographer, designer, consultant and business owner of Earthues, a natural dye company.

The textile community of weavers, spinners, quilters, knitters, dyers, stitchers and felters was in the midst of a huge revival during the 1960s, 70s and 80s. We were experimenting with weave structures, spinning any fibre we could lay our hands on, making quilts that hung on the wall, felted funky hats and experimented with dyeing all of that cloth, yarn and fibre with chemical and natural dyes. The few natural dye books available instructed us on using flowers, roots and bugs to colour our cloth with the help of mordants. Most of those mordants were heavy metals that were bad for the environment and our health.

Michele was a pioneer, looking for another way to make natural dyes colourfast using non-toxic natural ingredients. The search for traditional methods used by other cultures took her on a quest for many years through Europe, Southeast Asia, South Asia, South America, Africa and Central Asia.

She shared her findings and recipes with the textile community through workshops, presentations and her publications: *Color Trends and Natural Dyes for Artisans of the Americas* and notebooks that accompanied her workshops. But Michele was not content with such a small, captive audience.

She became a board member for the Color Marketing Group and helped companies like Aveda, Origins, Esprit, Martha Stewart Living, Terre Vede, LL Bean, and Nature Conservancy, develop products that could bring awareness of the value of natural colours to a larger world.

Michele's vast knowledge and sense of colour was sought out by government and non-government agencies for the development of naturally dyed products throughout the world. She worked with: Organization for American States, Aid to Artisans, DOBAG in Turkey, USAID, and UNESCO to help develop repeatable, sustainable eco-methods for creating beautiful colours for cottage industries, textile cooperatives and small companies.

In 1995 she won the United Nation's Fashion Industry and Environmental Award for environmental stewardship on the development of an ecological natural dye process for the American textile industry.

Michele's passion for tinting the world with natural colour has touched so many lives throughout the world with her enthusiasm and heartfelt connection to the people she taught and learned from. Her husband, Andro, continues her legacy through Earthues, a business working in partnership with artisans to fulfill their dreams. Michele Wipplinger has left us with an example of an active, purposeful life, full of curiosity, creativity, warmth, and joy. We could best honor her life by following her lead.

There will be a memorial on May 9 at Sunset Hill Community Centre, 3003 NW 66<sup>th</sup> Street, Seattle, WA – Arrival 1pm, Service 2pm, Reception 3pm

Karen Selk