

古風流韻香雲紗

有這樣一種絲綢
穿著在身上
僅憑摩擦時發出的聲響
便令人為之著迷
好似在奏響一曲
對自然與大地的頌歌

WEARABLE POETRY

A unique cloth with an ancestral heritage, Chinese mud silk is entering the world of contemporary fashion

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Photos courtesy of Noir Mud Silk

Behind her distinctive glasses, Marcella Echavarria is highly animated, eyes sparkling as she speaks. “It was the first time that I could actually *hear* a textile. I was immediately obsessed—it was fascinating,” she says.

“I was in a darkened restaurant in Beijing and heard the mellifluous sway of a lady’s trousers as she crossed the room. The fabric was unlike any that I’d seen before—I was transfixed by its evocative swish.”

Echavarria, a Colombian lifestyle specialist and textiles entrepreneur, is telling the story of her first encounter with mud silk: a rare and ancient Chinese fabric with over 2,500 years of history.

“Mud silk is a blend of resilience and poetry. Its process is so intricate that it requires resilience; at the same time it’s so discreet, so subtle, that it’s like wearing poetry,” Echavarria says, her ardour palpable. “Mud silk is part of the heritage of China—the heritage of the world.”

A story of silk

A remarkable cloth born of earth, water, and sunshine—and shaped by artisanal tradition—mud silk is a material of contrasts. It’s irresistibly luxurious yet demonstrably sustainable. One side is dark and glossy, with water-resistant properties. The matte, earth-toned reverse gets its colour from the natural dye of a medicinal yam called *discorrea cirrhosa*, which infuses the material with antibacterial properties. Unlike most fabrics, mud silk improves with time and wear—its sheen is enhanced, its texture softens, and its colours intensify like the patina of fine leather.

It’s not difficult to see why Echavarria fell in love with mud silk. After making her discovery in Beijing, she traced the fabric back to its beginnings in 5th century Guangdong. At that time, Hakka fishermen in the province were treating their precious nets with yam juice to prevent rotting. Afterwards, they observed that the same nets turned black after repeated exposure to the mineral-rich mud of the Pearl River Delta.

These elements were then applied to indigenous silk to produce the rare and special mud silk, known in China as *xiang yun sha*. Referencing the silk’s ultra-soft, sonorous characteristics, its historic translations include “perfumed cloud clothing,” and “singing silk cloth.”

Over the following centuries, particularly in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the textile gained admirers around the world as it was exported via the Silk Routes. By the 1920s, the period of China’s silk industry boom, aristocrats across both East and West were clamouring for the very finest mud silks on the market, their prices surpassing even gold.

“It was a silk originally used by workers, but after it evolved into fine clothing it became one worn by emperors,” Echavarria says. “I love that kind of luxury. Throughout its history, it has been a fabric for everybody.”

The craft of mud silk has been passed down over millennia. Handmade in a natural closed-loop organic ecosystem—thanks to the silkworms that eat the leaves of the mulberry trees planted alongside the water—mud silk production is both seasonal and time-intensive.

Still produced only in Guangzhou between the months of March and November, its processes include drying and grinding the yams, dyeing the fabric many times until the desired colour has been absorbed, and applying fine, iron-infused mud from the Pearl River to give the material its signature lacquered texture.

Bolts of natural silk are soaked up to 40 times until the rich brown colour is set. The silk is then taken to the Pearl River and coated in mineral-rich mud. Rinsed in the same river, it’s then left to dry and cure the tannin and plant-dye colour and to allow the fibers to age and mellow.

天然蠶絲面料被反覆浸泡晾曬數十次，直到變為深邃的棕紅色。然後再浸入珠江富含礦物質的河泥中，讓輕薄的絲綢在化學反應下變得堅韌凝厚。



“Mud silk is a blend of resilience and poetry.”

—Marcella Echavarria



The fabric has contrasting surfaces on each side: a glossy black face and a matte orange-brown reverse achieved using yam (*Dioscorea cirrhosa*) from Guandong, a medicinal tuber known for its antibacterial and antiviral properties benefiting people with sensitive skin.

香雲紗的染色採用了廣東當地出產的薯蕷，完成後一面是紋理豐富的橙褐色，一面則是閃著深邃光澤的烏黑。純天然的材質和製作過程，有滋養皮膚的功效。

「第一次聽到它的聲音，我立刻就被迷住了，真是太迷人了。」如今說起與香雲紗結緣的一刻，Marcella Echavarría依然興奮不已，雙眼閃閃發光。

那是Marcella在去北京的一次旅途中，餐廳裏昏暗又安靜，一位女士走了過去，Marcella聽到她的褲子發出了一種奇妙的織物擺動摩擦時發出的聲音。「那種面料與我之前見過的都不一樣，光是聽它發出的沙沙聲，我就怔住了。」

後來，Marcella知道那種面料名為「香雲紗」，是一種古老、工藝獨特的真絲面料，在中國已有兩千多年的歷史。最令Marcella感到驚奇的是，與印象中纖薄脆弱、珍貴精緻的真絲不同，香雲紗的質地是堅韌厚實的，而這種獨特的質感是源於它製作過程中使用了天然植物染料和泥土。「香雲紗是堅韌與詩意的交織，它的製作過程非常複雜，質地色澤在堅韌質樸中不乏精美，穿上它就像穿上了一首詩。」

泥土中誕生的絲綢之王

中國嶺南地區古法製作的香雲紗，又名「苧紗」，是用薯蕷和河泥將絲綢染製而成的。傳統的香雲紗織造，要先將絲綢布料放入薯蕷汁中反覆浸泡晾曬三十次，才能讓原本輕薄的絲綢變得堅韌厚實。在這個過程中，布料的顏色也會從乳白慢慢變成紅棕。浸染完成後，再將布料拿到野外覆上河泥，這一過程中不能接觸陽光，否則會影響河泥中的化學成分與薯蕷汁中的成分發生反應，所以工匠們只能在凌晨時分摸黑工作。

等到將河泥清洗乾淨之後，還要對布料進行數次薯蕷汁的浸染晾曬，香雲紗才算大功告成。它一面是紋理豐富的紅棕，另一面則是閃著深邃光澤的烏黑。堅韌厚實的質地讓它更經久耐穿，甚至會像皮革一樣在歲月的打磨下更柔軟，更有光澤，顏色也會愈加深邃。而它「香雲紗」的名字，其實曾經是「響雲紗」，正是源自穿著它走路時所發出的令Marcella著迷的沙沙聲。

在北京發現香雲紗之後，Marcella萌生了將其帶回故鄉哥倫比亞的想法。她認真研究了中國絲綢和香雲紗的歷史，發現早在中國漢朝打敗匈奴開闢通往西方的絲綢之路以後，中國絲綢便成為波斯帝國和羅馬帝國王公貴族們最鐘愛的奢侈品。到中國明清時期，隨著海上航路的逐漸發展，絲綢製品更是風靡整個歐洲。1920年代，香雲紗受到了歐洲貴族們的追捧，人們稱它為絲綢中的「黑珍珠」，價格甚至超過了同等重量的黃金。

「香雲紗曾經是平民穿著的絲綢，因為它更耐磨，還涼爽舒適，但後來它又成了國王御用的絲綢。縱觀歷史，它一直是幾乎適合每個人的面料，但我還是更愛它有點奢華的感覺。」

如今香雲紗的主產地依然是中國嶺南地區，並幾乎延續古法完全由手工製作完成。當地溫暖的氣候非常適合桑樹的成長，養蠶業自古以來便非常發達，種植薯蕷的歷史也由來已久。珠江淤泥中所富含的鐵質，更是令香雲紗擁有獨一無二色澤質地的的重要因素。

綜合上述種種情況，Marcella決定要像她的歐洲祖先們一樣，從中國採購香雲紗，然後讓這種古老神奇的美麗面料在當今的歐洲再一次成為眾人矚目和嚮往的奢侈品。

真正的奢侈品

自上世紀九十年代全球興起「快時尚」後，許多如香雲紗一樣費時費力的古老紡織和製衣工藝都在面臨消逝的危險。在中國，香雲紗的製作受到文革衝擊，在六十年代便停止了，這導致許多現代人都沒聽說過香雲紗，只有些懂行的收藏家還在追崇它。

好在一些倖存的老工匠還是將香雲紗的製作工藝傳承下來，並克服重重困難在當地又創辦起了香雲紗工坊。但作為時尚從業者的Marcella深知，僅憑工匠們的努力還不足以讓這門手藝再延續千年，它需要融入當下的時尚界，讓更多人接受和認可，才可能有更長久和良性的生命力。

2020年，Marcella創辦了Noir Mud Silk，一個主打香雲紗服裝的奢侈時尚品牌。「我按照自己對時尚的理解來經營這個品牌。我不關注潮流，不關注尺碼和性別，我不是一季一個系列，而是做固定的產品。我的服裝男女皆宜，遵循古典的服飾造型，例如：軍服和束腰外衣。這是最好的尊重面料和製衣傳統的方式。」事實上，在愛上香雲紗之前，Marcella從未想過要做一名服裝設計師，「但愛上香雲紗之後，我就不得不做了。」

在從中國採購到香雲紗之後，Marcella開始在她的故鄉哥倫比亞著手將它們變成永不過時的服裝。她先是找到了一位有製作高級服裝經驗的女士，並為這位女士和她的家人打造了一間完善的工作室。「他們就像在做藝術，把每一塊面料都物盡其用。」

儘管不會自己動手製作高級服裝，但Marcella在時尚領域的經驗非常豐富，她有可持續發展專業的碩士學位，還有多年的高端時尚雜誌工作背景。她在2010年創辦過一間諮詢公司，主營業務便是幫助當地工匠將產品推廣至更廣闊的舞臺，延續他們傳統工藝的文化價值和發展活力。該公司成功的案例包括：與設計師Donna Karan合作打造了全球第一批將產品與傳統手工聯繫起來的奢侈品牌SURevolution；與他人共同創辦了傳統紡織品年會XTANT。「我一生都在與工匠打交道，我注重實實在在的品質。」

近年來，「可持續發展」一詞頻繁出現在各個領域的品牌宣傳材料中，但Marcella依然保持著對「可持續」一詞嚴謹認真的態度。「從文化上來說，我們是在傳承一個有五千年歷史的文明，通過講述它的故事，讓人們將它穿著在身上來理解它，並讓它更廣為人知。」從社會意義上來說，Marcella認為Noir Mud Silk的創辦既為香雲紗工匠提供了經濟支持，還保證了他們可以延續之前數千年的工作方式。「我們的工作沒有截止日期和季節性，我們做我們的衣服，工匠按照之前的生活方式，順應自然的狀態就好。」

儘管Noir Mud Silk的產品面料和設計始終會圍繞香雲紗為主，但Marcella坦言她在世界各地的旅行經歷經常會為品牌帶來形形色色的設計靈感。「如果我去西藏，可能會受到僧侶們穿著的袈裟的啟發。」其它類似的想法還包括往其中填充真絲來保暖的冬天穿的坎肩，或者一些家居用品。「人們很喜歡香雲紗與皮膚接觸的感覺，會想睡在上面。」

面對未來的無限可能，Marcella感覺自己的香雲紗事業才剛開始，人們會隨著對這種天然面料的了解，而愈加愛上它。「真絲可以保養皮膚，穿著香雲紗就像是在使用非常昂貴的護膚品。它是一種很划算的投資，讓你的皮膚更接近泥土，更接近大地。」

From past to present

Like many traditional crafts, the making of mud silk has had its share of obstacles. The onset of China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) led to an abrupt halt in silk production, while the rise of fast fashion in the 1990s led to a new global demand for synthetic fabrics. These days, while still sought after by enlightened collectors, mud silk is not known to many outside the textile trade.

When manufacturing slowly started up again in the 21st century, only a handful of artisans were familiar with the age-old methods of production.

Keen to preserve the ancestral culture of mud silk while introducing its age-old beauty to the world of contemporary fashion, Echavarría successfully transformed her passion project into a luxury label with the launch of Noir Mud Silk in 2020.

“I do it following my own principles on what fashion should embrace,” she says. “I follow ancestral shapes, such as kimonos and tunics. It's about respecting the material and its traditions in the best possible way. I'd never thought about being a fashion designer before, but after falling in love with mud silk, it was a project I just had to do.”

After sourcing the raw fabric from China, Echavarría crafts it into her timeless garments at an atelier in her home country of Colombia. “I found a lady who was trained in haute couture, so I developed a whole workshop for her and her family. They are very artistic and make use of every single scrap of fabric,” she says.

Though she was brand new to the world of fashion design when she launched Noir Mud Silk, Echavarría was prepared with a masters in sustainable development and a background in high-end fashion magazines. She had also established her eponymous consultancy firm, which continues to operate today.

Specializing in branding luxury and sustainability with deference to culture and traditions, the firm has helped elevate many local artisans to the international stage. Echavarría's career highlights include working with designer Donna Karan on SUREvolution, one of the first global brands to connect luxury with handmade, and co-founding XTANT, an annual gathering of the heritage textiles community.

“I've been involved with artisans throughout my life. I have an eye for quality. We become excellent by elevating something that is excellent,” Echavarría says.

While “sustainability” has become something of a buzzword in luxury fashion in recent years, Echavarría takes the premise seriously within Noir Mud Silk, meticulously applying its various meanings to every aspect of the business.

“I'm helping the continuation of a heritage from a 5,000 years civilization, putting it on the map by telling its story, by having people wear it and understand it,” she says. “Then there's the social aspect of the people who make the clothing—the business is helping to improve their lives. ... The artisans have a lifestyle that's respectful to the cycles of nature.”

Though Echavarría has no immediate plans to deviate from Noir Mud Silk's core collection offering, she notes that her travels may influence future designs. “If I go to Tibet, I may become inspired to create *chubas*.”

Other concepts she has considered include a padded winter vest stuffed with silk and a potential home line. “People are so in love with how mud silk feels on the skin that they want to sleep on it,” Echavarría says.

“Mud silk is the equivalent of wearing a super expensive face cream. It's a real investment. It's the closest thing to wearing earth, or even ceramic, on your skin.” 🌱



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