

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Conserving Textile Heritage Methods for the Earth's Future

Think City collaborates with Yayasan Warisan Johor, Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur Natural Dye and Natural Indigo Lab & Atelier to present the Natural Dye Exhibition in Johor Bahru

Johor Bahru, Dec 11:

Think City has launched the Natural Dye Exhibition at Galeri Tenun Johor in collaboration with Yayasan Warisan Johor (YWJ), the Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur (JFKL), Kuala Lumpur Natural Dye (KLND) and Natural Indigo Lab & Atelier (NILA) to showcase the processes and findings of a five-year research project by JFKL and KLND involving natural dye techniques in textile production.

The exhibition aims to conserve heritage techniques but also to share knowledge in the hope that the craft and textile production communities can be acquainted with the toll of synthetic dyes on the environment, and return to natural dye techniques utilising plant-based resources. The objective includes increasing public awareness on the issue, so that consumers may begin the demand for natural-dyed fabrics.

Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Managing Director of Think City said, "The climate crisis requires urgent action and the textile industries have been identified as among the largest contributors of water pollution, caused by toxic residues from synthetic dyes."

"In fact, the wastewater from textile-dyeing processes is classified as the highest-polluting in the industrial sector, with an estimated 10 to 50 percent of synthetic dye residue ending up in local waterways, as the wastewater from the dyeing process is usually untreated."

"It is our hope that the outcomes resulting from the Natural Dye Research project we have conducted in collaboration with JFKL and KLND will help us make progress in the fight against reducing textile-related pollution, and facilitate the return to natural resources, while conserving our batik heritage and knowhow," added Erna Dyanty, project lead for KLND .

Historically, the textile industry in Malaysia, especially batik fabrics, were dyed using natural resources - mainly vegetable or plant-based substances - while synthetic dyes were only introduced in Malaysia in the 1930s. The research project is also an attempt to recover lost methods of natural dyeing and to reinstate the usage of plants in the process.

Seiya Shimada, Director of The Japan Foundation, Kuala Lumpur said that the exhibition reflected the final stage of the 5-year research-based project that JFKL had been working on together with KLND and now with NILA.

“The research project started off in 2015 aiming to rediscover and revive natural dye practices in Malaysian batik, using natural materials from Malaysia and dyeing techniques from Japan. The exhibition will showcase the works from two previous exhibitions; “BATIK: EXPLORING NATURAL DYES” (2017) and “BATIK: FROM SEED TO TEXTILE” (2019) as a result of this research project, as well as to see the possibility in applying natural dye in other types of traditional textiles especially *tenun* Johor,” he explained.

“I sincerely hope to see the knowledge and techniques shared among craftsmen, and for more local collaborations to happen to further develop Malaysian traditional textiles and crafts.”

Inspired by earlier initiatives from agencies such as Institut Kraf Negara, which initiated and conducted research on natural dyes, the Department of Environment, which launched the Greener Batik Process Initiative and standard operating procedures in 2013, the research project is currently at its final stage - introducing and sharing natural dye techniques with the artisanal communities and the public.

Director of Yayasan Warisan Johor, Sharil Nizam bin Abdul Rahim emphasised that the exhibition could benefit the local textile industry in several ways.

“Apart from encouraging the widespread usage of natural dyes in the local textile industry, craftsmen and women can also learn to vary their techniques, and not just use synthetic dyes. Meanwhile educators can ensure that these heritage techniques are shared with future generations,” he said.

Meanwhile Sharil said that projects such as these would also contribute to the culture and tourism sector.

“It’s our hope that the exhibition will attract international tourists and enable them to get to know the heritage and culture of Johor.

“The research project also feeds the new iterations of our heritage textiles such as Kain Benang Johor, (which integrates new innovation and design into our traditional woven fabrics), by offering creative and cost-saving opportunities,” he added.

As part of the exhibition programme at Galeri Tenun Johor, a natural dye workshop was conducted by KLND on December 1st, 2019. Supported by Kraftangan Johor and YWJ, 21 participants from diverse backgrounds came together to learn basic natural dye techniques. Most of the participants included artisans such as batik makers, craft makers, weavers and art educators. The half-day workshop began with a sharing session by KLND on the history of Natural Dye, research findings and dye techniques, followed by a hands-on experience.

Participant Jamil bin Sulaimi of local design house, Teluk Belanga Design, said that the workshop enabled him to expand his techniques and knowhow in fabric dyeing.

“This is my first time participating in a workshop that teaches you about Natural Dye. I was really excited since this is my first experience using natural ingredients such as mango leaves to dye fabrics,” he said.

“I have been to many textile factories in Johor or China, but this is the first time I have learnt about natural dyeing and its possibilities. I will try to apply these techniques for my new products such as scarves and souvenirs. I feel that this workshop should be extended and continued not only for craft makers but also for school students.”

The Natural Dye Exhibition was created to increase public awareness for a greener, chemical-free and sustainable textile industry. It is also a platform for future collaboration between YWJ and KLND to produce natural-dye yarn for woven textiles produced by Galeri Tenun Johor. Think City is supporting this project under the Gallery Improvement Programme (MAGNET) to promote Johor Heritage and Culture.

The exhibition is open till February 26th at Galeri Tenun Johor, Kompleks Warisan Sultan Abu Bakar. For further information see <https://www.ifkl.org.my/events/natural-dye-exhibition/>

Ends

About Think City

Think City is a social purpose organisation dedicated to improving the wellbeing of communities by creating more sustainable, liveable and resilient cities. Established in 2009 to spearhead urban regeneration in George Town, their impact and successes have led to expansion into Butterworth, Kuala Lumpur, and Johor Bahru. Adopting a community-first, evidence-based approach, Think City focuses on four main communities of practice: Placemaking, Resilience, Analytics and Conservation. Owing to their position as a neutral party, Think City has enabled synergies between the public and private sectors, the community and international partners. Together, they work to implement projects that enhance the heritage, art & culture, environment, economy and resilience of cities in the ASEAN region. Think City is celebrating their 10th Anniversary with a year-long programme of events and projects. For more, see thinkcity.com.my.