



maureen mubeem: peach is beautiful

Interview and Photos
by Baron Wolman

After Woodstock tie-dyed clothes were really in. Well, maybe they were in long before that, but all I know is that the first time I consciously noticed tie-dye was when John Sebastian took the stage at that Festival. So here we were, starting a fashion oriented Paperzine, and I was thinking that it might be a fine idea to do a tie-dye story. Sure, most of the national magazines had already paid their homage to the art (Maureen had been featured in Time, in color no less), but you know how publishing people are: "We'll do it different, we'll do it better . . ." Had democracy won the day, our tie-dye story would have been out. To a man, the staff thought the idea long out of date. True to my sign, I persisted.

I had been warned about Maureen. "She may not agree to do the interview," I was told. "She'll want to talk to you first to see if you two get along." Fair enough: journalists have a deserved reputation, and she probably has her reasons.

But you're never really prepared for chance meetings with people like Maureen, are you? When you happen upon someone with whom you have

immediate intuitive communication, the response is so totally exciting and refreshing that all the regular rules suddenly change and the game gets moved on to another level.

And that's about what happened on the afternoon of the interview. It's anti-climactic to tell you that I dug Maureen a lot. The following is a healthy portion of what was said that day. The photos were made later—it's hard to focus a camera when your head is off somewhere on its own.

First off, I would like to tell you about colors. Red is basic energy, creative energy and warmth. Orange is nervous energy, related to the nervous system. Yellow is intellectual energy. These are positive colors, they are very "on" and they put out strong vibes. Green is next. There are different kinds of greens—the greens nearer the yellow are the colors of jealousy and hatred. The greens nearer the blue are the colors of harmony and peace, turquoise included. Blue is the color of truth, purity. Purple comes next. It should be between red and blue, but they are at opposite ends of the spectrum, so it comes after blue. Mix red and blue together and you get purple, highly moralistic with a definite energy behind it. Purple, heli-

otrope and orchid are very soft religious colors. Pink, they say, is the color of a cosmic sort of love not passionate selfish love which is a brownish red.

All colors give back energy by giving back light. Except for black which absorbs and doesn't reflect anything back. The strength of a color is based on the reflected light that comes from it. But black doesn't give off light, it absorbs light. If you wear black, you don't absorb reflections from anyone else; it nullifies vibrations.

Do people wear less black as they gain self-confidence and therefore become more open?

I don't think it has much to do with self-confidence. It has to do with your sensitivity or your absorption rate of other people's vibrations. Gray, on the other hand, especially a pale gray, is supposed to be the color of wisdom. It's a balance between giving out everything and drawing in everything. Gray can be downright sexy.

Anyhow, colors depend upon the person who's wearing them. The color you like is more important than the color that physically seems to suit you. If you really like yellow, for instance, you can find a shade that will work for you even if your skin is

very close to yellow. Somehow you'll choose a color that suits you because there's some kind of secret communication whereby you know what's going to look nice on you.

If you choose a color because you know what that color is supposed to mean, do you think it has that specific effect on you for that moment you're wearing it? Or is there more validity in a choice that is made intuitively?

Like I said, we all know subconsciously the effect of colors on ourselves. The things that I notice other people doing intuitively, I become conscious of, and when I point these things out to them, they become conscious of them, too. But they still will choose the same colors.

Sure, when you're choosing something to wear for a certain situation, you can almost tell when it's appropriate to the way you feel at the moment. One obviously supports the other, but I can't see the actual relationship. If you say to yourself, I want to feel a certain way, therefore I will wear a certain color, therefore I will feel that certain way. Does it really work like that?

Let's put it this way. When I was living with someone else, a girlfriend, a designer, I noticed that she was very up-tight, like suppressed energy, like a steam valve; she had on red and orange, an orange tee-shirt with red flowers. She kept clenching her teeth and saying, "Oh, I don't know what's the matter with me today." And I said, "The first thing that's the matter is that tee-shirt. Take it off and put on something blue or green." She did and it calmed her down. I can't explain why it worked, it just did. An operating theatre is green; you open your eyes and when you see green it soothes you. You go into the countryside and what do you see? Greens and blues, very soothing colors. You go downtown to the neon lights and what are they, orange, yellow, red, all vitalizing colors. "Come in here," they say, "you'll have a good time." The punch is in the lower register of the spectrum; the soothing colors are in the upper register, past yellow. Everybody knows it subconsciously and uses it. Once you become conscious of it and watch other people, it blows your mind. They paint apartment buildings pink, home; pink is a very warm, loving, soft color. And you react, "Oh pink, lovely." But if the same place were painted orange, it would be too jangling, and





you'd say, "Oh, well, I don't know."

Color is what finally pushed me into design. Quite frankly, I was appalled at what people do to themselves with color. Once I went into a hotel room in Vancouver; it was purple and turquoise, and I couldn't sleep in it. I had to get up, get dressed and get out. I told the hotel clerk, "You should whip or sack the cat who decorated this place. He did you a great injustice." "Why?" he asked. "To decorate a room that you're going to sleep in in purple and turquoise is very distressing. Anyone who is even a slight bit sensitive isn't going to be able to sleep in it. Have you ever slept in any of these rooms?" "Of course not, I only work here, I don't sleep here!"

What is your favorite color?

Peach, I think. Peach is beautiful, a very peaceful color, very old. It makes me feel natural, mainly because it's not aggressively any particular color. It's not related too strongly to the primaries. It's red and yellow together, but it's still non-committal. And it's close to the color of skin, so it makes me feel invisible.

Astrologically and metaphysically my colors are yellow and white, though I seem to be changing now to blues and purples. I've been wearing more purple lately. But you ought

not relate colors too much to astrology, otherwise you get bogged down in too many details.

So your tie-dyeing is simply another extension of your whole color theory?

Yes, that's what made me interested in it in the first place. I started out on my own clothes; I didn't want to mess with anybody else's. After I did that little blue and green dress I had on yesterday, I felt quite heartened because I had never seen anyone else do one quite like that. It was much softer. I used one primary and its neighboring colors, something no one else had done. Most people who tie-dye use only primary colors all together. It encouraged me that it could be a much more subtle thing. I realized that in a way it was like painting, except that your canvas is a moving body with material on it.

What type of things have you tie-dyed?

Well, I've got an offer to do the sails on a Chinese Junk. And I've dyed my bed sheets.

Why?

Why? That would be best answered by having you sleep on some tie-dyed sheets. The feeling of lying in color is just exquisite.

Do you sleep differently?

I think I do. I enjoy going to bed

more. I like the feeling of vibrant colors.

Have you made love in tie-dyed sheets?

Yes.

Is it any different?

I suppose it is, but I guess I lose my powers of observation . . . I really don't notice, I guess.

Come on. When I saw your tie-dyed sheets they were highly sensual and they were inviting, not only to sleep in, but obviously to love in, too.

Yes, it's true. When you look at somebody lying on a sheet, and it's plain white, it's antiseptic. But when someone is lying on a sheet and there is a burst of yellow all around him, there is something about him, you know. Oh boy!

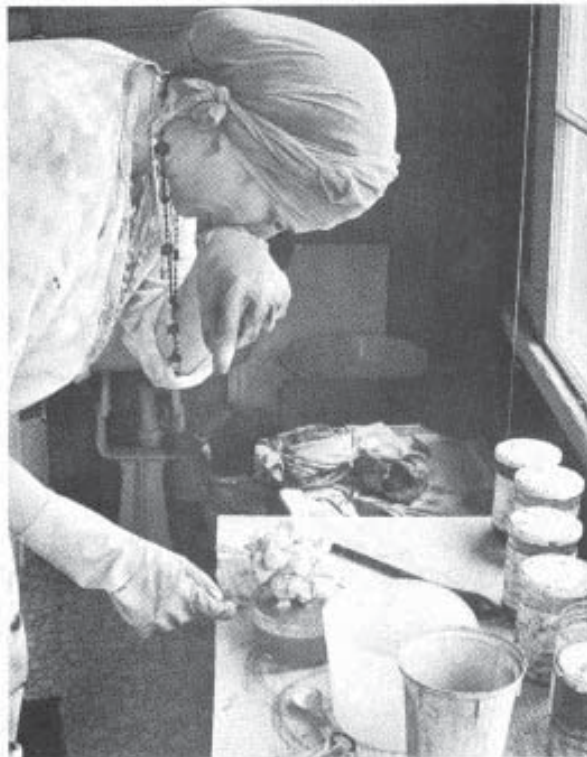
Are there people for whom you've always wanted to tie-dye something?

Yes, the Stones. It made me very happy to do work for them because I appreciate their creativity; I felt that by giving them my creativity we were somehow sharing. I like working for other artists.

How about doing something for Janis Joplin?

Sure, I would do tie dye for her. No, not just if you would, but how; what colors would you use?

I would do darker and slightly vio-



lent colors for her. She wears a lot of black, so darker colors seem to make her more comfortable. It's a very peculiar sensitivity that artists seem to have about black, you know. The "no vibes" thing again. Black just doesn't pick up vibes and doesn't send out any; it's very protective. And I would use bold patterns for her, very bold. Maybe even slightly erotic . . .

How about Frank Zappa?

I would love to do something for him, something with a lot of contrast. Some of the things he says I don't particularly care for, you know. But at least he's got a lot of oomph. Sure it's perverted in it's own sort of funny way, but it's very close to the . . . you know . . . well, I can really dig him. It's ludicrous what he says, but at the same time the ludicrousness is very human. He's laughing at everything and that's all right.

What colors would you use?

Laughing colors, and contrasting. I would probably use reds and yellows with a white contrast, say, red merging into purple or merging into blue on both sides of red.

Have you ever sold your things in boutiques or shops?

Listen, once somebody was very interested in some capes I was making, tie-dyed capes in satin, with embroidery, the whole thing. I was

making one for John Sebastian; John is a dear friend, so it was a very special piece. A young lady who runs a boutique saw it and said, "Wow, make some capes for me." And I said, "Well, how much would you pay me?" And she said, "Well, how much are they?" "Well," I said, "I am charging \$200 for this one." She said, "Wow!" You know? And I said, "How much would you charge in your shop?" And she said, "\$400." I said, "You have got to be kidding. Do you think I'm going to let you double the price on the fruits of my labor? You're out of your mind." She couldn't understand my being upset that she should get \$200, which is the same that I'm getting, for my work. I don't need customers of that sort. I would rather make capes for \$200 for someone and have fewer customers. See, I design for people, individuals whom I meet, whom I get to know a little bit. We talk about things. What do you like? I see them, I see what colors they need or want. Some people even come to me and say, "Hey, dress me, please."

One girl called me and said, "I'm going to do a TV show. Would you please come and look at my wardrobe and tell me what to wear. I trotted over and put something together for her and she wore it. I like those kinds

of things. They are creative. But I don't like the things where I am making something for sheer profit, to get hung in a show-window or whatever.

What is the most extensive tie-dye wardrobe you have done for anyone?

I guess the Stones. A few pair of pants and a few shirts. They were for Bill Wyman mostly. He just dumped his wardrobe and said, do it.

While they were here on tour?

Yes. They had a lot of clothes, you know. Maybe it was just Wyman who came with them all. He wasn't about to say that this was Mick's, and this is so 'n so's. We just got a bunch of them, plus several yards of fabric. Three and four yard pieces, some five yard pieces. That was the best, I enjoyed that the most.

The raw fabric?

Doing fabric, yes. I made up a pair of pants, too, and they were beautiful. I was really happy with them.

OK now. Suppose you were just starting out in tie-dye. What would you need?

I would need pots from one cup size to about a quart. And a larger pot, like a soup pot, and a wash basin, nothing bigger.

Nothing more sophisticated?

No, that's all. Plus rubber gloves because the solutions are often dan-

gerous. You use very strong chemicals, caustic soda and hydrosulphide.

Are those the colors, or do you add those to the colors?

That's what you add to make it all happen. Caustic soda opens the pores of the fabric, breaks down any dye resistant film that is on them. Then the color can go in, an aniline base color. Then you put in the hydrosulfide which closes it, firms it, you know, and then you hang it in the air; that "develops" it, oxidizes it, or what have you. Or no, it's the hydrosulfide that develops it, I guess.

I mix my color, put the first chemical, caustic soda, in and put the fabric in and leave it for ten or fifteen minutes, depending upon the depth of the shade I want.

The longer it's in, the deeper the final color?

Yes. Next you put the hydrosulfide in, which stops it from taking, stops it at that shade and also turns the color to its opposite. When you undo the knots it's like magic. You have the color, its opposite and the tones in between. When the air gets to it, it goes back to the original color you mixed.

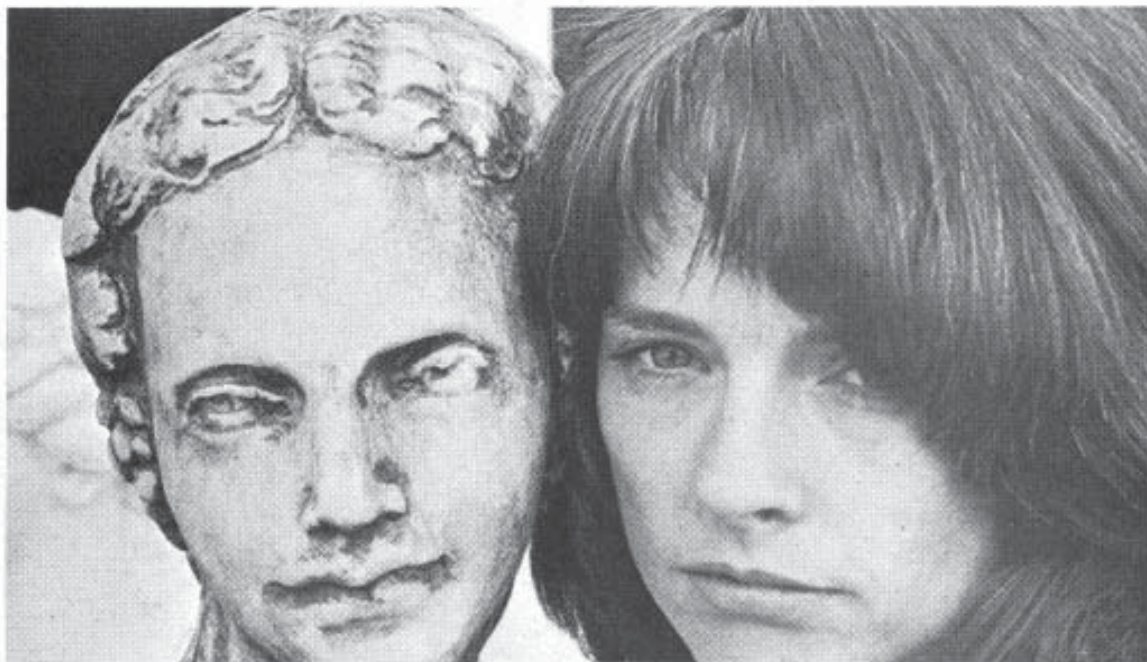
What kind of dyes do you use?

Aniline vat dyes.

What quantities do you buy it in?

Fifteen pounds at a time, primary





colors only. My dye bill comes to about sixty dollars for fifteen pounds. The other chemicals I get from a chemical supply house, about five pounds each. They cost around nine dollars total.

You should also have some kind of rubber cap, like a shower cap or something, though I just put a scarf over my head. The fumes dry my hair and make it brittle. The chemicals seem to react with the oils in your hair and reduce the oil content. You can feel it happening. Another thing I noticed is that after I have used these dyes I get a very heavy chest congestion. Ideally, you should use some kind of mask with these commercial dyes. If you use Rit, though, there are no fumes, but it doesn't hold up as well as the aniline dyes. Two or three washes and it's gone. Aniline lasts about twenty washes before it starts looking real faded.

Suppose someone gave you a tee-shirt to dye. How would you go about tying it?

The first thing is to decide where you are going to have your mass, your color. At first I used to tie-dye every square inch of the piece. Now I realize you don't need that much, provided you use your colors correctly and balance it so there is a good bleed on the colors from area to area. That's how you get those incredible natural things that happen between the two.

Anyhow, I look at the tee-shirt and

decide what I am going to do to it, where I want the areas of color. I might want pink on the left shoulder and a swath of blue from the right shoulder to the left side. I knot the shoulder and separate an area with rubber bands. The bands leave white lines so when you tie them you know where your lines will be.

Do you tie them very tight?

No, not too tight. Tension is very important. If you tie it too tight the dye doesn't soak into the fabric; if you don't tie it tight enough you don't get any lines, just a blob of color, which is no-where. No one can tell you; you have to learn by experimenting.

Suppose I came to you with a shirt and said that I would really like you to tie-dye it. What would you say?

I'd say, "Great! I'd love to tie-dye something for you. What's your favorite color?" You might say blue. And I would say, "Do you like blue-greens or blue-purples?" You would say blue-purples, or blue and brown, or whatever. Then I would ask what sign you are and if you know anything about your chart. And I would just work it all in.

For instance, for a Virgo I'd make a more intricate pattern. For a Leo I'd make a bursting thing, maybe a sun burst. I just pick up clues and apply my color theory.

If a person is soft and gentle, he gets soft colors. If he is strong and vibrant (or if that's how he impresses

me), he gets vibrant clothing. It even surprises me sometimes. I just did some things for a young man who is blond. When I looked at him he gave me the visual feeling of being a bit colorless. I thought I'd better not do things too bright or it will drown him out. So off I went to the dye works and started dyeing, but the colors came out vibrant. I thought oh-oh, he's not going to like these; I'll have to fade them out somehow. But he loved them, and when he put them on they suited him tremendously. So even if my conscious feelings are not correct, my instinctive decisions usually are.

Also I try to find out what the thing is for. Is it a dress-up thing, or an every day thing, or a performing thing. I really don't know what kind of difference this makes, but it does somehow. And if I don't like the person I'm doing it for, it ends up lousy no matter how hard I try. My inside thoughts about the person usually come out.

One more thing; have you ever tie-dyed a handkerchief?

Sure, scarves and all, yes.

No, I mean handkerchiefs to blow your nose in.

Yes, those, too.

You know, I'd love to blow my nose in a tie-dyed handkerchief!

Wait a moment. I've got one you can have. Here. Your first piece of tie-dye. It's nice to give someone their first of something. . . .