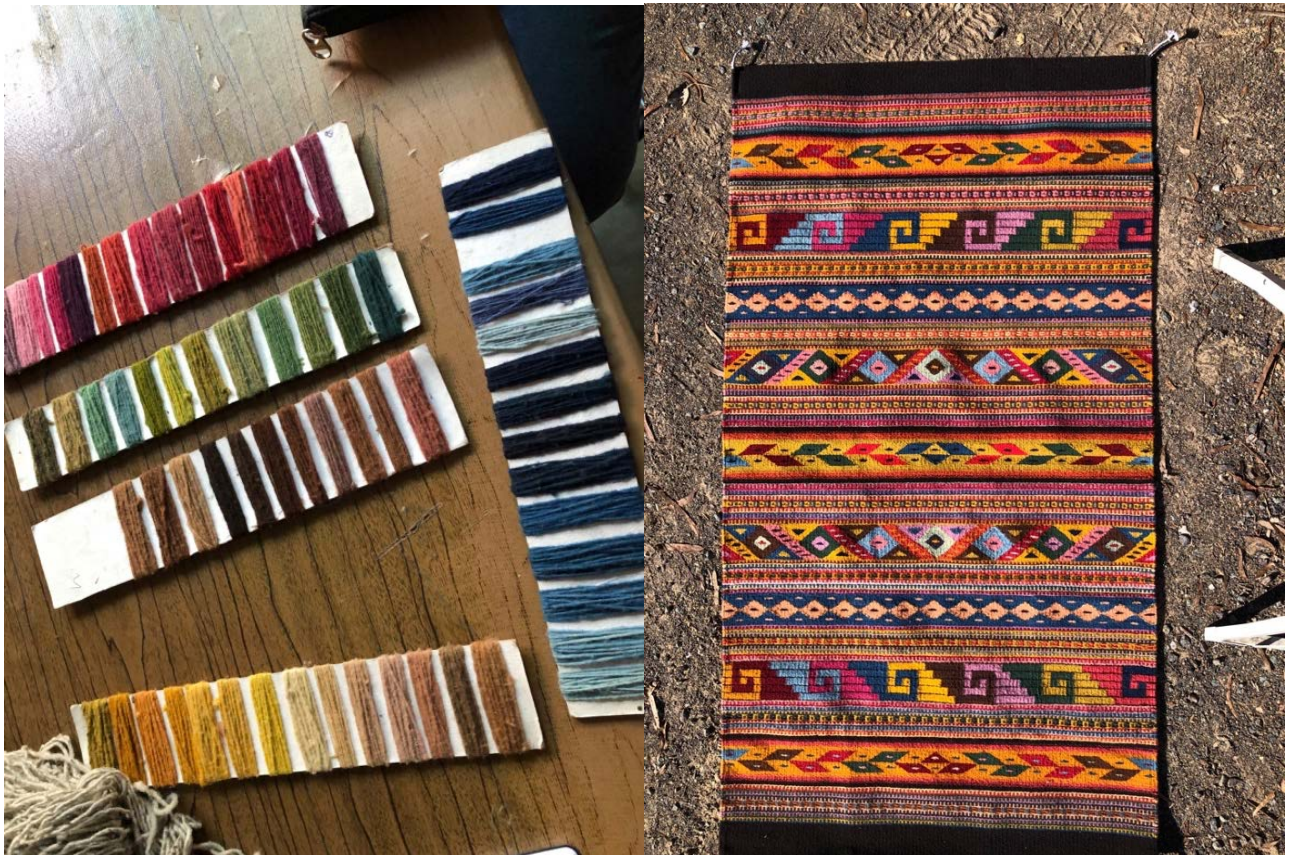


Arquetopia Foundation Residency, Oaxaca, Mexico, May 2025

In May 2025, I received an opportunity to take up an Arquetopia Foundation residency in Oaxaca, Mexico, with travel funding from artsACT. The three-week residency offered a unique opportunity to receive knowledge of indigenous colour work, generously shared in an environment where some of the botanical colours that I engage with were originally developed. My understanding and respect for these beautiful and ancient colour substances was greatly strengthened in that environment.



Dyed merino wool samples. Botanical dyes on merino wool rug made by Fermina Ruiz

I was introduced to Zapotec master dyer and weaver, Fermina Ruiz, at her home and workshop in the Teotitlan Valley of regional Oaxaca. Communication with Fermina was in Spanish, and I don't speak Spanish! My Arquetopia guide and Oaxaca resident, Claudia, gave assistance, while information was more often conveyed through demonstration and visual attention.

Fermina guided me through the process of washing merino wool skeins and mordanting with ground rock alum in hot water, in preparation for dyeing. Colours were extracted from botanical substances simmered in water over a portable electric hotplate. With Cochineal, an addition of squeezed lime juice filtered through a strainer for pink colours. The addition of Cream of Tartar for magenta.



Cochineal dyed wool with added lime juice. Cochineal dyed wool with added Marush.



Marush dyed wool washed and drip drying. Washing indigo-dyed wool.

After dyeing, skeins were lightly washed in clear water from the house well, before hanging out to drip-dry.

Various shades of colour were adjusted according to the length of time in the dye pot. If green was on order, *Marush*-dyed, washed and dried wool skeins were dipped into the indigo vat.

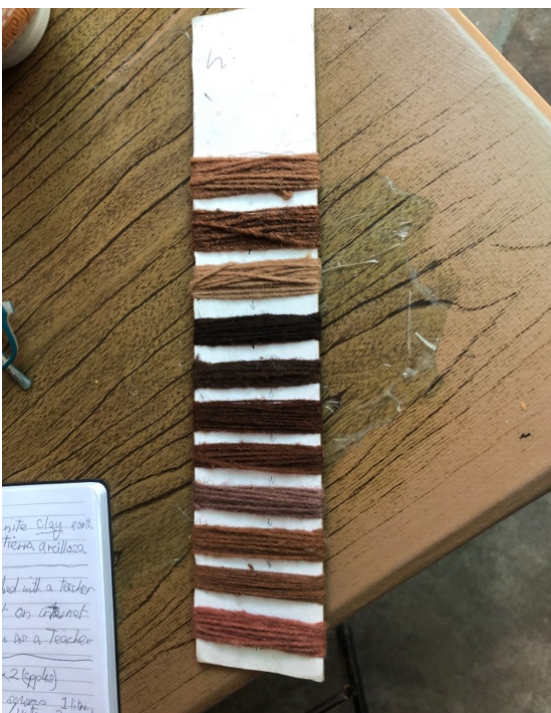


Fermina adding *Marush*-dyed wool to the indigo vat. Liz lifting green-dyed wool from the indigo vat.

BOTANICAL SUBSTANCES WE WORKED WITH

Zapote Negro, a fruit shaped like a small apple, green to dark brown as it ripens.

Dye colour: beige to brown to dark brown.



Zapote Negro preparation. Zapote Negro sample colours on wool.

Marush, Mexican marigold.

Dye colour: yellow to orange.



Marush dyed wool to orange colour

Cochineal (*Grana Cochinilla*)

Dried insects, ground with a stone pestle and mortar and washed in a preparation of fresh water and pure alcohol before being strained.

Dye Colours : pink to magenta to red/orange.



Grinding cochineal.

***Anil* - Mexican indigo tree – (*Indigo suffruticosa*)**

A large enamelled pot of *Anil* leaves was permanently fermenting in the courtyard and occasionally warmed over a small wood fire in an iron grate. In practice, we dipped wool skeins into the fermenting liquid and, after a good stir, pulled them out to drip dry.



Indigo-dyed wool drying.

The Arquetopia Residency in Oaxaca included an academic program that emphasised critical practice with artistic research, including an introduction to Mexican culture through the history of colonial impact.

Art historian, artist and co-founder of the Arquetopia Foundation, Francisco Guevara led the tuition with his partner and academic coordinator, Nayeli Fernandez. I was sent published art theory essays to write and comment on, with discussion sessions on Zoom with Francisco and Nayeli from their headquarters in Puebla. These sessions were challenging and extremely interesting. I found strong empathy with my colleagues.