



## ISMINI SAMANIDOU

This textile designer documents details that surround us, including cracked walls and peeled surfaces onto fabrics, using natural mediums

TEXT BY **VIDULA KOTIAN**

### IN BRIEF

**SIGNATURE:** Ismini Samanidou, MA (RCA)

**NATIVE:** Greek

**CALLING:** Textile Designer

**TRAINING:** Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, BA and The Royal College of Art, MA

**EMPLOYMENT:** Woven Textiles Lecturer and Technical Assistant at Falmouth College of Art, Cornwall, UK and Educational Assistant at Coppice Wood Primary School, East London

**ASSIGNMENTS:** George Spencer Designs, Freelance Designer; Wallace Sewell, Studio Assistant; Tait and Style, Photographer for the London Fashion Week; et al

1. "Twigs" is prototype woven on a computerised jacquard loom using viscose, linen, silk and metallic yarns

2. "Ismini" design for George Spencer Designs used on a chair. The fabric length was woven on a computerised jacquard loom using cotton, wool and paper yarns

**W**e spotted Ismini Samanidou at 100% Design, London, enthralling passersby with the natural tales she spun with her textiles and decided we must introduce you to this rising fabricator. Here are excerpts from our tete-a-tete with her:

**ELLE DECOR: When did you discover your passion for textiles?**

**Ismini Samanidou:** I have always loved pattern, texture and colour, and during my foundation studies realised that textiles was a medium that allowed me to express this zeal. Whilst studying the textile design course at Central Saint Martins College in London, I was introduced to woven materials and it all seemed to click then. Through weave I could explore the constructive potential of cloth, and combine it with my other great love, the logic of mathematics. I was fascinated by the way raw material and yarns, could be set in a controlled mathematical way on a loom and by applying different structures to the yarn, cloth would be created.

**ED: What was the inspiration for your first collection?**

**IS:** Nature and surface influenced and inspired my work from the very beginning. One of my first weaving projects was based on close-up photographs of geological formations, and the yarns that made up the warp were arranged in such a way as to reference the intricate layering of the rocks. Photography is another great passion I hold, enabling me to document details that surround us and provide motivation for design work.

During my studies at the Royal College of Art I went on a work placement to a textile mill in Antigua, Guatemala. I remember spending most of my free time walking around town, documenting the cracked, peeling walls and distressed surfaces of the buildings. Upon my return to London I used these images to design a textile collection for interiors. My aim was to transform these peeling surfaces into textiles, and place them back on the wall as coverings and upholstery.





1. "Field" prototype woven on a computerised jacquard loom using viscose, linen, cotton, wool and metallic yarns
2. "Gold Leaf" laced on a computerised jacquard loom with viscose, metallic yarns
3. Threads of a metallic yarn
4. "Moss" fabric length woven on a computerised jacquard loom using cotton, wool, paper, linen and metallic yarns
5. "Forest" woven on a computerised jacquard loom with viscose, metallic yarns
6. "Thalassa" woven on a computerised jacquard loom with cotton, paper yarns

The idea – bringing the exterior within the interior. I used materials such as paper and linen, to imitate the dry texture of a painted wall, and used a combination of hand and machine weaving techniques, and print processes.

**ED: What do you think is the difference between your process then and now?**

**IS:** Since I started working on the computerised jacquard loom and designing on machines, technology has become an integral part of the creative process. I can now use my photographs in a more direct way, and am able to produce large-scale complex work, which would otherwise be unachievable by hand weaving techniques. The resulting fabric retains a very personal and hands on feel to it, but can still be manufactured on a mass production scale.

**ED: Describe your typical creative routine – from the germination of an idea to its execution.**

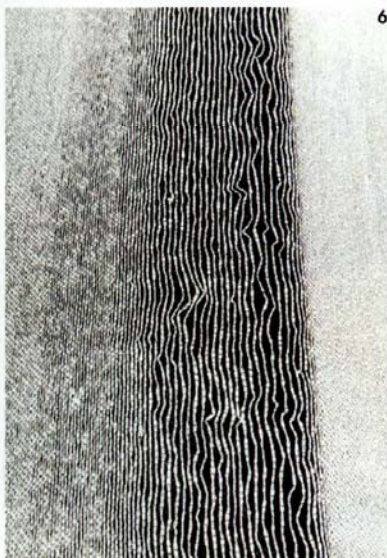
**IS:** Anything can spark off a new idea. It can be a book, an image from a magazine, a textile technique I want to explore, a happy accident when making a fabric. I love doing research, going through magazines, reading books, visiting exhibitions or going through the boxes of photographs I have taken over the years. I collect the images and materials

that inspire me and have them around in the studio.

I then choose one image to develop into a design. This is usually done on the computer, incorporating special software to make the design into a woven design file, ready to be laced on the loom. At this stage, I choose the materials to create the fabric with, and start sampling on the loom. This is a lengthy method based on mostly trial and error, until the best results have been produced and the collection is formed. I find that in my work one idea leads to another, resulting in a narrative linking the projects together.

**ED: Tell us about your favourite project and why?**

**IS:** My pet work was an installation I created in the island of Kea, Greece. It was inspired by Greek mythology, the myth of Arachni, which explains the birth of weaving. In the legend, Athena was said to have invented weaving and the one to weave cloth for the gods and heroes of those times. She then taught the craft to mortal women. One of the women, Arachni (which means spider in Greek) was so talented and the fabric she wove so exquisite that the goddess Athena became jealous. She decided to transform Arachni into a spider, placing a curse on her to weave forever, beautiful webs that would always be destroyed.







1, 2 and 3. "The Revenge of Arachni" installation consists of a large web made with silk thread and enmeshed with found objects. It also has five A1 photographs, five digitally printed silk organza hangings, an installation of found enamel lamps suspended from the ceiling and a digital projection on a metal ring embellished with a silk web



When I read the myth I was disappointed that the talent of Arachni was only rewarded by punishment, and felt there should be a twist to the myth.

During one trip to Greece, I came upon a disused enamel factory in the island of Kea. I was inspired by the power in this deserted space, and determined I had to somehow incorporate it in the myth I had read. The installation I created was called "The Revenge of Arachni" and comprised of a huge web made of silk thread that constantly grew, in a space that was becoming a ruin. I was amazed to see real spiders making their webs on my web, extending the power of the revenge further. I loved this project not only because it allowed me to work within a space in a grand scale, and to explore weaving in a less controlled way but also because it is linked to my heritage, Greek mythology.

**ED: What are the kinds of assignments that get you going now? Are there any currently that you are really excited about?**

**IS:** I am in the midst of developing a textile collection exploring the combination of woven cloth with embroidery techniques and using hand weaving processes. I am also looking forward to collaborating with a furniture designer, to fabricate a range of furniture inspired by textiles. At the moment, I am very excited about teaming up with a mill in England to manufacture a unique textile piece. This enables me to experiment with scale and to produce work on advanced technological facilities at the mill.

**ED: What does the new year have in store for you?**

**IS:** It will be a very creative one! I am thrilled about developing a new range and experimenting with various techniques. In February 2006, one of my pieces will be exhibited with the Lesley Craze Gallery at Collect, a gallery show at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

In autumn, I will be completing the residency I was awarded by the Crafts Council that I have greatly enjoyed. I am also planning a research trip to Asia later on this year, and am looking forward to visiting India for the first time!

**ED: As a teacher, what do you think is vital to learning textile design?**

**IS:** The most important thing when learning is to be given the space to discover your creative ability by a mentor who inspires, and can see your abilities allowing you to grow and develop your individuality as a designer.

In addition to a technical understanding of the medium, having access to influences and being aware of the importance of research to the depth and quality of the work, you must know and understand the context for the operation.

**ED: Describe your goal or style statement in a line.**

**IS:** First and foremost, I would like to remain an artist of woven textiles. ♦

*Ismini Samanidou, London.*

*E-mail: ismini@isminisamanidou.com*

The ELLE DECOR team travelled to London courtesy British Council, India. Inquiries: 17 Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi 110001. Tel: (011) 23711401

