



Asher Katz



# DO OR DYE

by Alyssa LaFaro

In the late 1980s, Michael Katz recognized the potential of an artistic fashion and hobby trend and launched Red Label Silk Color dyes, the first product under the Jacquard brand name. Since then, his family-owned company has found product inspiration in many other fabric-coloring techniques – shibori, ikat, indigo, tie-dye and screen printing among them – and offers easy-to-use dyeing supplies for everyone from school children to commercial artists.

Michael's son Asher, Jacquard's president and CEO, spoke to me recently about the company's ability to successfully respond to and fuel trends, and make complicated processes easier. Here's what he said.

## WHERE DO YOU GET IDEAS FOR PRODUCTS?

**ASHER KATZ:** We try to keep our finger on the pulse of what's trending in the creative world and respond to it with the best products. We like to make the techniques easier and accessible for more people.

Here's a for-instance: The popularity of screen printing has been growing, and we have a line of water-based Professional Screen Inks that are permanent on a huge variety of surfaces, including fabric, paper, vinyl and plastic. It's easy to use because it doesn't require heat-setting – it air cures – and it has an extended open time. Printers can have it on their screens for a very long time during

production runs without it drying out.

Our pre-reduced indigo is another example. Indigo has been a popular color for centuries, and the natural dye is the oldest on the planet. But getting it into a working dye bath is very complicated – it has to be “reduced” and put into a liquid state. So we introduced a pre-reduced indigo that allows people an easy way into the process.

## AND IN THAT WAY, YOU FUEL TRENDS?

**AK:** Possibly. On the other hand, we offer products that have little precedence, like our Color Magnet that attracts more dye to the places it's applied. It makes two-tone printing with dyes extremely easy, because it creates contrast. We hope it will *create* a trend.

## IS THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION INFLUENCING JACQUARD'S PRODUCTS?

**AK:** There is both a movement toward digital media and a movement away from it. We try to straddle both. SolarFast, a printing process using light and dye, is an example. It's an analog product, for lack of a better word, used to create photographs on fabric. And photography, once an isolated process, is now done by everyone. We constantly take photographs, and what happens to them? They remain on a hard drive. SolarFast lets users put their photos onto a piece of fabric in a very physical way.

Another example is iPrint Ribbon, which allows users to print from their

computer onto a polyester ribbon using an inkjet printer. Crossover products like these are the most exciting, in my opinion.

## HOW DOES A 39-YEAR-OLD COMPANY REMAIN INNOVATIVE?

**AK:** At Jacquard, we are constantly pushing the boundaries and exploring the limitations of our products to come up with ideas that are new and exciting. Innovation always starts with experimentation. We also take our commitment to quality seriously. I've spent the last few months working to eliminate the ammonia from SolarFast in order to make it safer and odor-free. Because it included ammonia, we had to warn customers to *never* expose SolarFast to bleach or chlorine (because ammonia plus bleach equals poisonous gas). The product also smelled terrible.

Chlorine is a rapid oxidizer, and oxidation is what develops color in SolarFast (via UV light). What I discovered is that chlorine instantly develops SolarFast – no light required! This opens a lot of doors to new applications – ones that before the reformulation would have been unthinkable.

The SolarFast we ship now is completely odorless. It's much nicer to work with, and much more kid-friendly. As an aside, bleach/chlorine is no longer a safety issue. This means I can dip a painting, batik or block print made with SolarFast

### MONKEYSHINES

“Jacquard” is the brand name of the products manufactured by the Katz family, as part of their original company Rupert, Gibbon & Spider Inc., which started as a distributor for Deko products. The original name came from the gibbon and spider monkey pets that the Katz family kept in an open-air cage in the backyard of their Pasadena home. “Rupert was a neighbor that was constantly catching the monkeys in the humane animal traps he set for skunks and raccoons.

### TOP PRODUCTS

“Our Tie Dye Kits have been bestsellers, since the very beginning,” explains Asher. “iDye is also popular because it can be used in the washing machine. Other bestsellers include our metallic/pearlescent Lumier fabric paints, and Textile Colors, our standard line of permanent and soft-to-the-touch fabric paints.”

### SISTER COMPANIES

Silkconnection.com is an online store that sells imported silks and other fabrics that are prepared for dyeing. “In the beginning, silk was a much more integral part of the business,” Asher points out. “It’s not as big a player today, but it still very important to us.”

Jacquard Inkjet Fabric Systems offers fabrics, inks and steamers. It also custom-coats and backs fabrics with paper so they can be used in wide-format printers by designers and artists. “It grew out of our silk business,” Asher adds. “My dad foresaw that everything was moving toward digital media, and he was one of the first people to treat fabric for digital printing.”



into a dilute chlorine solution and instantly develop it to the maximum depth of shade. I can also apply SolarFast to fabric and then paint or print chlorine on top.

I’ve also experimented with mixing PearlEx into Photo Emulsion, which allows me to create metallic/pearlescent photographic images. Photo Emulsion is used to create photo stencils on a silk screen; it is never used for direct application on a substrate. But I figure, why not?

Here’s just one more example: Our Airbrush Colors and Dye-Na-Flow paints work great through refillable markers. If I mix our Discharge Additive into the paint, I can use it to draw on black fabric to achieve wildly intense colors that stay perfectly soft to the touch. Soft color on black fabric has always been a major challenge.

Being able to draw on dark grounds without leaving a thick deposit of opaque ink is super-cool, and you can do it in one step (as opposed to discharging first and then coming back to hand-color the discharged areas).

### HOW DO YOU GET THE WORD OUT?

**AK:** Our website, jacquardproducts.com, features step-by-step instructions, tips, FAQs, projects, videos and technical information on all our products. Our customer service representatives are also very well-trained on how to use our products and the possibilities they offer.

We are also committed to training the retailers who carry Jacquard Products, so they can better understand how to use them for the best results. Jacquard educators go from store to store, across the country. In my experience, retailers more than appreciate this kind of information sharing. For us it’s a necessity – we want everyone to know what our products can do so they know how and why to sell them. Our goal is to build a strong identity in all the markets we serve, from fine arts to crafts to garment making.



**ART MATERIALS**  
**RETAILER**  
 FOR PEOPLE WHO SELL ART SUPPLIES

*Keep up-to-date on the latest trends.*  
 Sign up for our monthly  
 product e-newsletter

**ArtMaterialsRetailer.com**

**THE JAPANESE PAPER PLACE**

**japanesepaperplace.com**