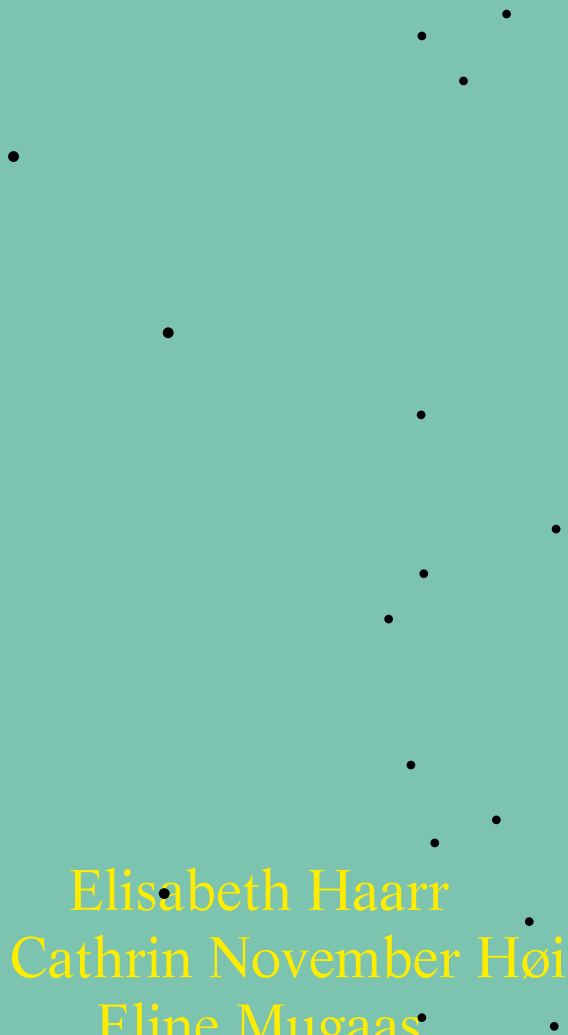
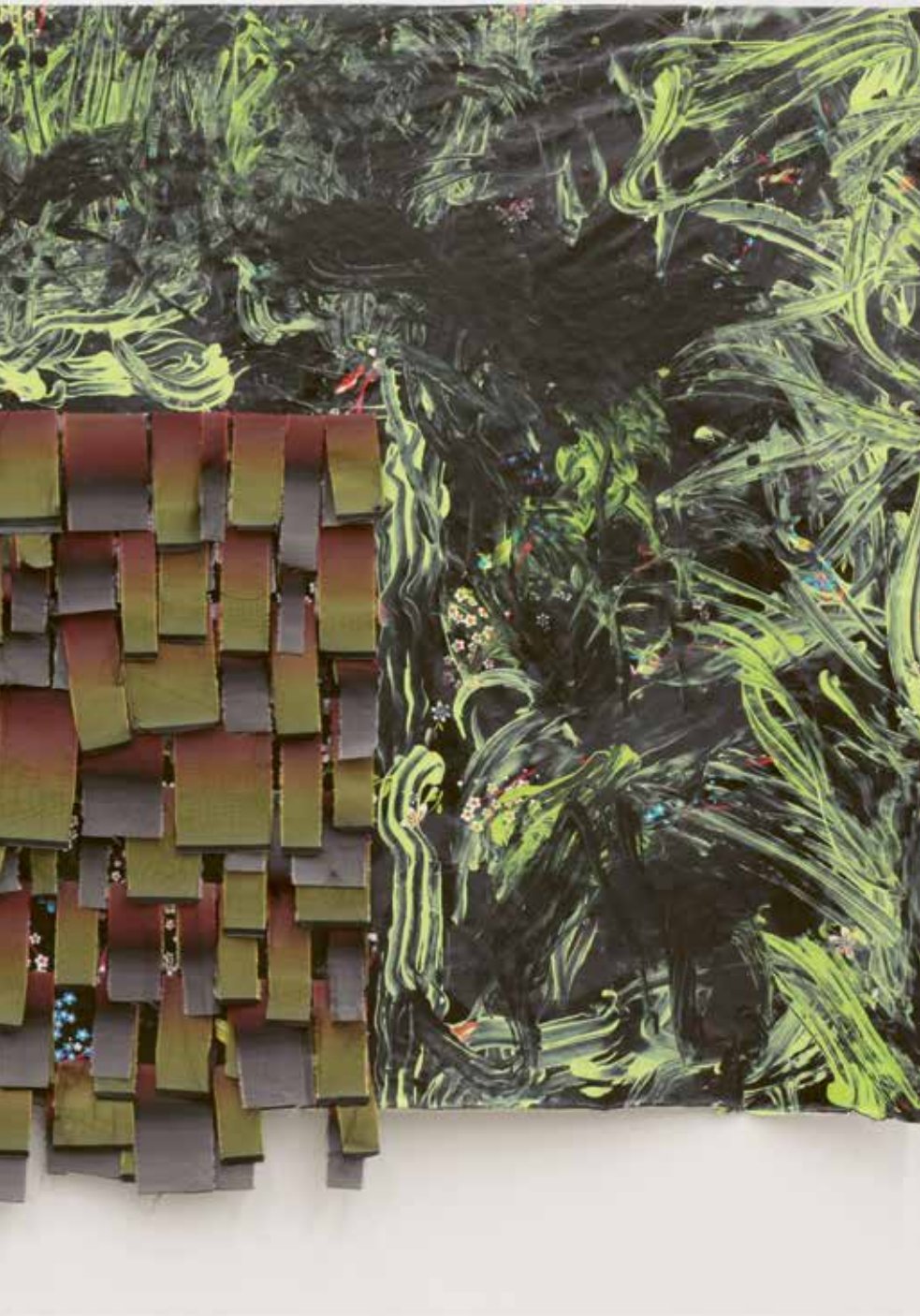
The Life Instinct



Elisabeth Haarr
Ann Cathrin November Høibo
Eline Mugaas




ALBUM

The Life Instinct

The title derives from the American artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles' MANIFESTO FOR MAINTENANCE ART 1969! in which she describes the "binary of the 'death instinct' and the 'life instinct'."

The death instinct advances separation, individuality, and unparalleled freedom; it is recognizable as a core value of the twentieth-century avant-garde. In striking contrast, the life instinct involves the unity required to maintain the world and the systems and operations that sustain life. […]

One instinct promotes dynamic change; the other embraces the necessity of equilibrium. […] One is about creation, change, progress, and advancement. The other is about attention to renewal and repair – and the repetitive and often unrecognized work these aspects of life require. ●

Source: Patricia C. Phillips, "Making Necessity Art – Collisions of Maintenance and Freedom" in Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Queens Museum, DelMonico Books, Prestel, New York 2016, pp. 38–42

The Life Instinct

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Introduction

Between Tradition and Innovation

"It was the sails that lent the Viking longships their power and their reach."

– Cultural historian Kassia St Clair in "The Golden Thread – How Fabric Changed History".[1]

Leif Erikson would never have made it to America were it not for the sheep at home in Norway. When the Norse explorer made landfall in the year 1000, his ship had been powered across the ocean by the wind in its woolen sails – an early example of Norway's expertise in maritime technology. Knowledge about the processing of sheep wool into textiles was of crucial importance for the Vikings' seafaring activities and the establishment of their trading networks. The Vikings were the first Europeans to cross the Atlantic Ocean – a feat made possible by a combination of shipbuilding skill and advanced sail technology.

Because the Vikings' textiles have disintegrated, we know far less about their woolen sails than about the wooden structure of their ships. What we do know is that making the sails required enormous quantities of wool and that most of the work was performed by women. Equipping an ordinary cargo ship in the Viking Age (800–1030) with sails, seafarers' clothing, bedding and other textiles, required around 200 kilograms of wool and the equivalent of ten years' labor. For a warship with a crew of around 70 men, the figures are mind-boggling: equipping each ship took around 1.5 tons of wool and up to 60 years' labor. In other words, seafaring required an enormous investment, which involved large sections of Scandinavian society.[2]

The Vikings were not only raiders, they were also traders who travelled around Europe and the Black Sea, as well as along the western stretches of the Silk Road.[3] Because

1 St Clair, Kassia: "Surf Dragons – The Vikings' woollen sails" in *The Golden Thread – How Fabric Changed History*, John Murray (Publishers), London, 2019, p. 99
2 Ibid. p. 114
3 Hansen, Valerie: *The Year 1000. When Explorers Connected the World – and Globalization Began*, Scribner, New York, 2020, p. 3

From Sheep to Sail

For a sail of 1080 square foot (100 square meters), the Vikings needed 3,300 pounds (1,500 kilograms) of wool. It has been calculated that between the years 1030 and 1060, Viking sailmakers required a total of around 10.8 million square foot (1 million square meters) of wadmal (a thick coarse woolen fabric). The wool for the sails came from two breeds of primitive and very hardy short-tailed Scandinavian sheep, *utgangersau* and *spælsau*. A common feature of both these breeds is that they shed their wool, so that one can pluck or 'roo' the fleece off by hand, rather than by shearing. The resulting fibers are strong and long. They are also intact at both ends, which prevents the wool from absorbing water. Because the sheep lived outside all year round, their wool was also rich in lanolin, a wax-like substance that repels water.

For sailors today, wool would perhaps not be the most obvious choice of fiber for making sails, but the production process made these sails light, strong and water repellent, which in turn enabled the Vikings to sail fast and over long distances. The wool used for the warp had to be strong and withstand tensile strain and wind pressure, as well as being water repellent. The wool used for the weft consisted of much softer fibers that meshed the fabric together and made it windtight.

The production of a woolen sail was a long and labor-intensive process that relied on teamwork from start to end. In summer, one plucked the loose wool off the sheep by crooking one's index fingers and pulling downwards. The wool was sorted according to color and intended use, gathered into thick rolls and stored in sheepskin bags. The bags were smeared with fish-liver oil to prevent the wool from drying out or becoming rancid before the onset of autumn, when there would be time to continue the process.

Then the wool would be spread out indoors over the earthen floor. The heat from the hearth caused the natural fats in the wool to soften and begin to melt. The fibers were combed to remove tangles, and the long outer fibers were sorted from the underwool, with its shorter, softer fibers. Men, women and children all took part in this work. Once all the wool was sorted, the underwool was sprinkled with fish oil and put back into the sheepskin bags. The longer, coarse fibers were stored in wool baskets.

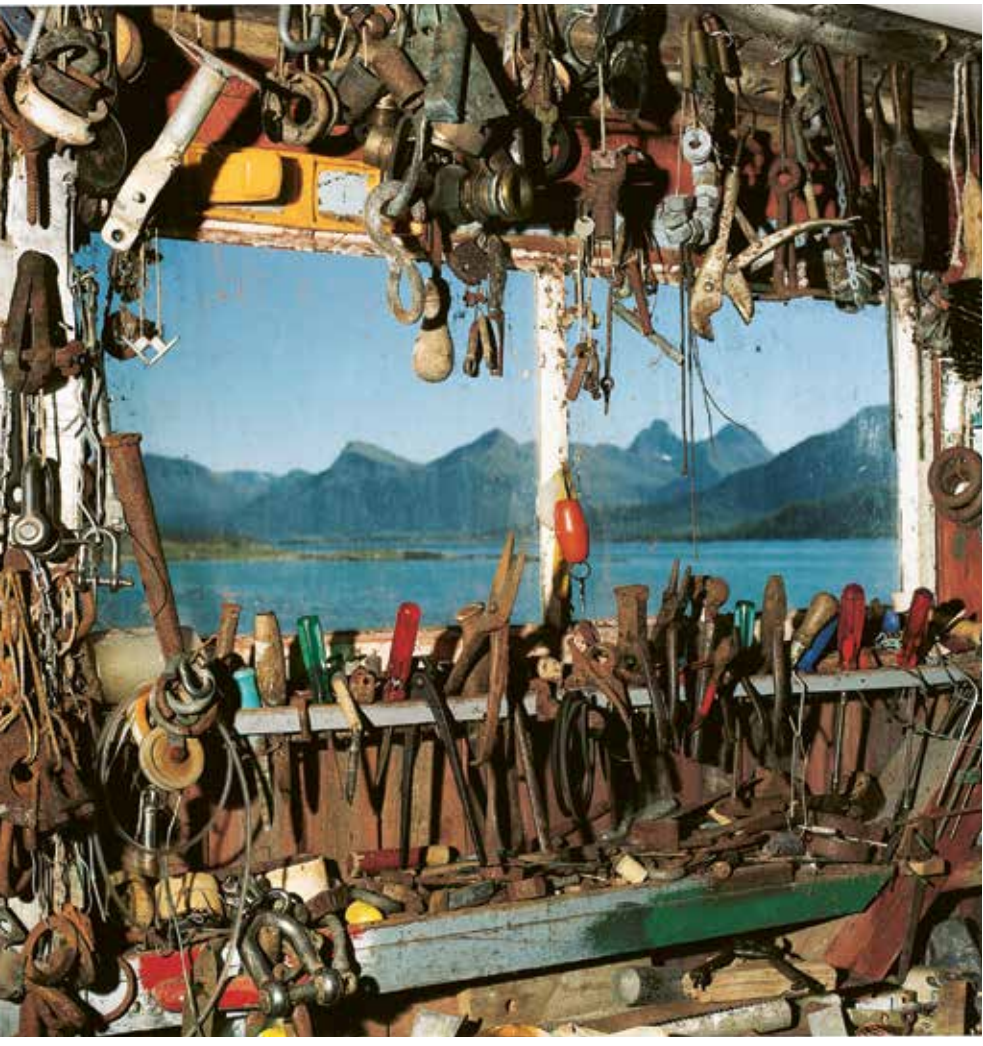
Once the sorting process was completed, most of the rest of the work was performed by women. They combed and carded the wool, gathered it into bundles for spinning, and spun it into yarn. The yarn was woven into lengths of fabric. These underwent a fulling process, both to prevent shrinkage and to make the fabric more windproof. One technique was to lay the fabric on the shoreline, weight it down with stones, and let the tidal ebb and flow do the work. Finally, the lengths of wadmal were sewn together by a sailmaker and the finished sail was brushed with a mixture of pine tar, fish oil and sheep tallow. This made the sail more windproof and water repellent. If one took good care of a sail, it could last for many decades. ●

Source: Lightfoot, Amy: *Plan for vern av kystkultur: En presentasjon av båtrya* [*Plan for the Protection of Coastal Culture: A Presentation of the Rya Boat Rug* – in Norwegian only]. Norsk museumsutvikling, Oslo, 2000

of their woolen sails, the Vikings could voyage farther than anyone before, and from their base in Greenland they reached America three times in the course of a few years. The first expedition, led by Leif Erikson, made landfall at three places that are now in modern Canada: Helluland, Markland and the most fertile place, Vinland ("Land of Wine"), where the men spent the winter before returning to Greenland, without having met any native inhabitants.[4] On the next two voyages, the Vikings encountered indigenous peoples and traded with them. The Vikings did not linger long before returning to Greenland, but their expeditions to the west became significant, because they linked pre-existing trading networks on both sides of the Atlantic.[5] Trade brought with it the sharing of information and the dissemination of experiences and culture over greater distances, and between places that had not been linked previously. In this way, the Viking longship was the year 1000's version of the internet.[6] The Vikings' voyages to America thus represented the first time that the entire globe was linked by trade routes, and accordingly one can say that globalization started with a ship sailing the Atlantic Ocean in the year 1000.[7]

Long after the Viking Age, wool continued to be essential for Norway's maritime industry. Without sheep, Norway would not have become a maritime nation. Norwegian men went to sea clad in layer upon layer of wool, while the women took care of the farms back home. Until the modernization of society, life along the Norwegian coast was no easy existence. Elisabeth Haarr makes this clear in her interview in this publication when she observes that "coastal women were no delicate flowers". Survival

4 Ibid. pp. 27–28. The historian Valerie Hansen writes that Helluland was most likely Baffin Island, which lies between Greenland and north-eastern Canada, and that Markland was probably on the coast of Labrador. There is a continuing scholarly debate about the location of Vinland.
5 Ibid. p. 2
6 Clinton, Hillary: Foreword in *Vikings – The North Atlantic Saga*, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, 2000, p. 9
7 Hansen, p. 3



***Utsikt fra en brygge / View from a Jetty* by**
Rune Johansen, color photograph, 138 x 138 inches
(350 x 350 cm), 1996 / 2006

Rune Johansen – Utsikt fra en brygge/View from a Jetty

A major work in the embassy's collection is *View from a Jetty* by the photographer Rune Johansen. This large photograph, which measures about 138 x 138 inches (3,5 x 3,5 meters), hangs in the garden room. The motif relates to an aspect of Norwegian coastal culture that many Norwegians will recognize and that extends many generations back into history. Right up until World War II, smallholdings that relied on both fishing and farming existed along the coast of Norway. Rune Johansen gives us a glimpse into a typical workshop in an old barn in the Lofoten Islands. A multitude of rusty tools hang around the window, framing a view of Lofoten's distinctive and dramatic mountains. The image blends a romantic natural spectacle with everyday realism. •

Source: KORO/Digitalt Museum

along the coast involved hard work. It placed demands on people's creativity and their ability to negotiate a partnership with nature.[8]

In one way or another, the sea has always been a cornerstone of Norwegian society. Fishing has been essential to Norway, from the age of the hunter-gatherers, with their basic boats and fishing equipment, to today's industrialized fishing fleet. Since the discovery of oil in the North Sea, someone who "works at sea" is just as likely to work on an oil platform as on a fishing vessel. And today there is a race to develop advanced offshore wind technology and other sustainable ways of using the ocean. Norway owes its wealth to the ocean, and infinite numbers of Norwegian stories and myths are linked to the role of the sea as a workplace, supplier of food, and travel route.

The two works by Elisabeth Haarr at the Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C. tell of traditions, journeys, love and rationality. **(pp. 1–3)** These works, from her series *Færdaminner/Travelogues*, portray journeys rendered in textile and paint on waxed cloth. The works encompass narratives not only about how the coast's culture of

8 Kjellmo, Ellen: *Båtrya i gammel og ny tid* [*Rya Boat Rugs in Ancient and Modern Times* – in Norwegian only]. Orkana Forlag a.s., Stamsund, 1996, p. 7

***Metamorfose / Metamorphosis* by**
Knut Steen, larvikite relief, 59 x 246 x 14 inches
(150 x 625 x 35 cm), 1986

Knut Steen – Metamorfose / Metamorphosis

In 1986, the well-known Norwegian sculptor Knut Steen carved a new relief in larvikite for the Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C. The relief, which was formerly located at the Embassy Row entrance and has now been moved into the garden, has a maritime theme. The semi-abstract relief shows a billowing sea juxtaposed with shapes that can be read as a human eye, a nose and a mouth, but which can also be interpreted as an island, the snout of a whale sticking up from the water, or a flame at sea (perhaps from an oil platform?). These playful associations are reflected in the title of the work – *Metamorfose / Metamorphosis*, a title that Steen had also used for a similar relief some years earlier – *Havets metamorfose / The Ocean's Metamorphosis*.●

Source: KORO / Digitalt Museum

design has evolved in step with people's needs, built on a robust combination of tradition and innovation, but also about how art contributes to shaping our lives. In the interview with Haarr, we learn how a line can be drawn directly from the coastal traditions of handweaving to contemporary textile art in Norway. This connection means, among other things, that the Norwegian tradition of tapestry is very different from the tapestry traditions found elsewhere in the world.[9] An impressive new example of Norwegian tapestry, which represents precisely this tension between tradition and innovation, is the monumental work that Ann Cathrin November Høibo has made specifically for the embassy's foyer. November Høibo's wall hanging *Dreams Ahead* **(pp. 4–5)** is handwoven, mainly in grey wool from a primitive native breed of short-tailed sheep, *spælsau*, with fields of color in the artist's distinctive jagged shapes, which create a sense of dynamism on the surface. In the work one finds references to landscapes, traditions, crafts, everyday life, high culture, painting and pop culture. Such a wealth of references can also be found in Eline Mugaas's new installation for the embassy, *Rocks in Tidal Water* **(pp. 6–7)**. For Mugaas's installation, five sculptures have been

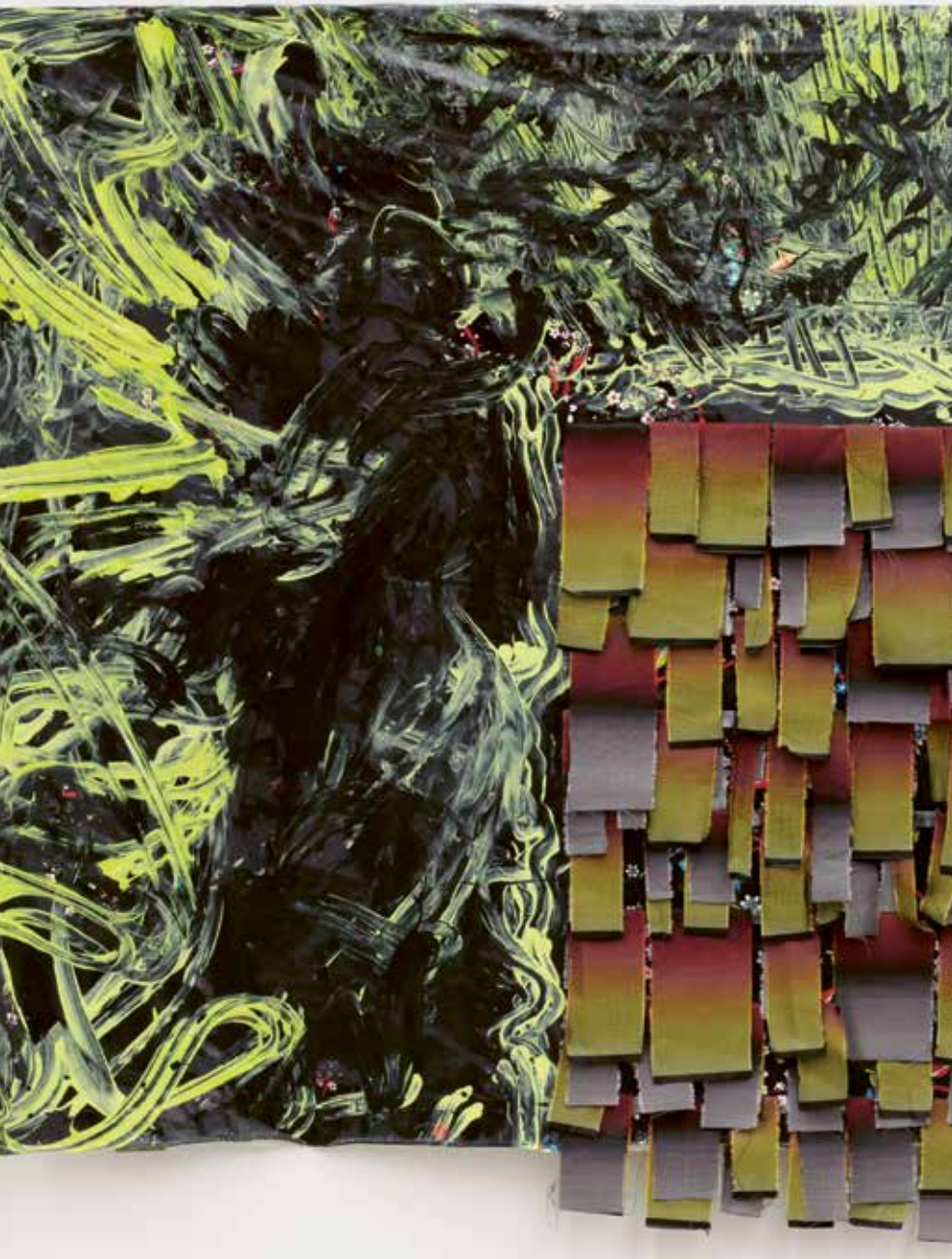
9 See interview with Elisabeth Haarr p. 49

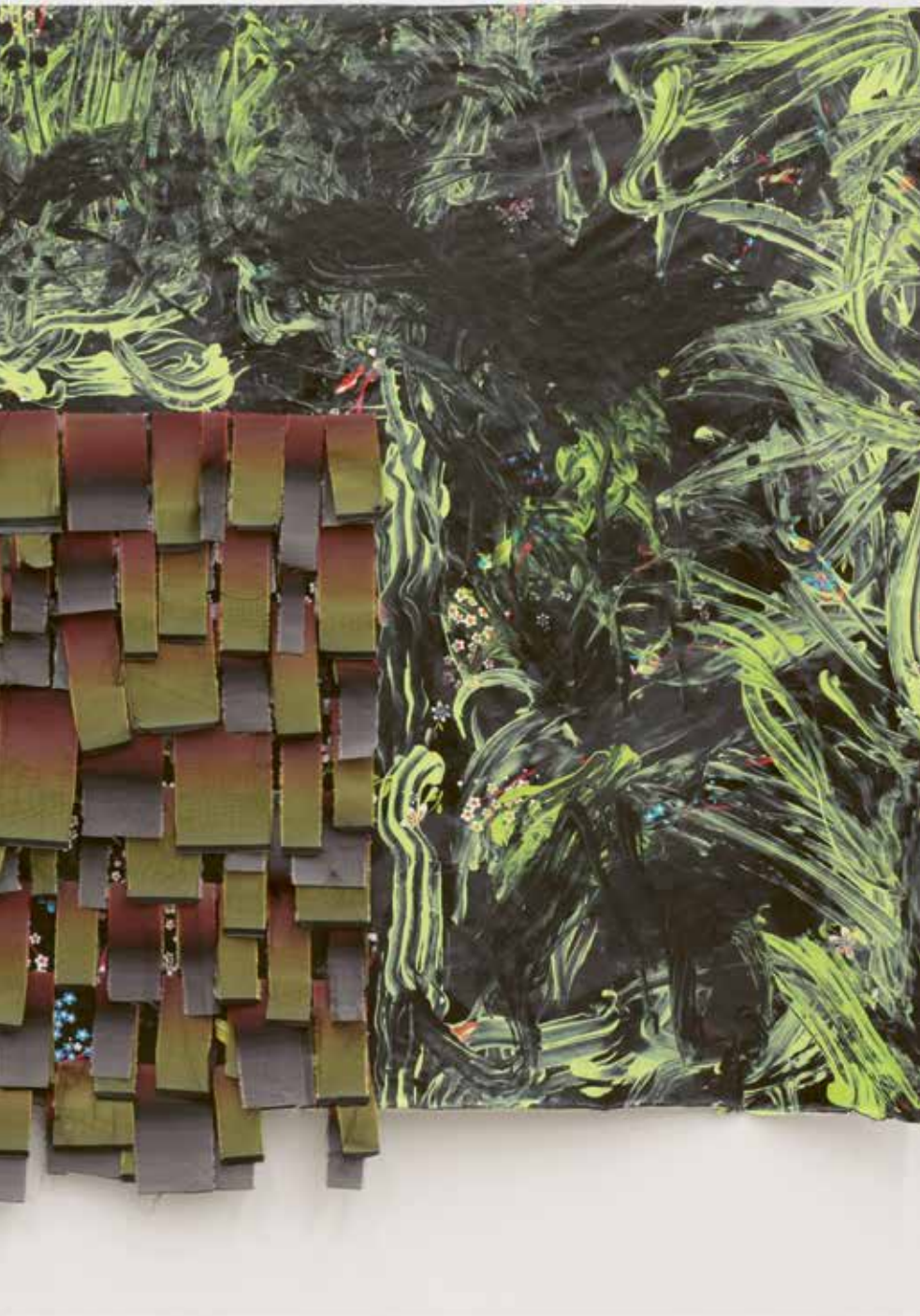
made from terrazzo – a material usually used for flooring. The sculptures are bookrests, displayed on a podium that also functions as a bookcase for art books that the artist has purchased for the embassy's library. Placing a book on a bookrest effectively hides the rest itself, and thus the rest's mode will continually oscillate between being a sculpture and its disappearing when it's used as a bookrest, not unlike rocks that emerge into view at low tide, but that are hidden under the water's surface for parts of each day.

All three artists' artworks for the embassy make direct or indirect references to Norwegian coastal culture, and each in its way addresses the interdependence of everything and everyone, how we all need supports to lean on, and how everything we do is built on something that went before. Norwegian technology and innovation have been made possible by collective knowledge and a living cultural history based on continuous communal upkeep. At the same time, it is important to remember that it is impossible to capture the artworks' multiple layers of meaning, reference and understanding in a few brief texts in a publication. They must be experienced, and each and every one of us must form our own understandings of them. The English sculptor Barbara Hepworth once said that one should use one's own body to experience sculpture properly – a notion that is also especially relevant for textile works. You will get more out of an artwork if you spend some time with it, move around it, lean towards it, and perhaps smell it, and also (if it's allowed) touch it.[10] •

Marte Danielsen Jølbo, 2021

10 The quote is taken from "Barbara Hepworth Sculptress" (1972), British Pathé, Youtube. Original quote: "I think every sculpture must be touched … You can't look at a sculpture if you are going to stand stiff as a ramrod and stare at it. With a sculpture, you must walk around it, bend towards it, touch it, walk away from it."





BEAUTY in Capital Letters
Elisabeth Haarr

Two artworks by Elisabeth Haarr have been acquired for the newly renovated Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C. The wall hangings *Færdaminne – OH Gunta!* (2013) **(pp. 2–3)** and *Færdaminne – Jammerbugt* (2013) **(pp. 24–25)** are part of a series of works titled *Færdaminner* (*Travelogues*) (2013-present). Each work is made from waxed tablecloths, to which Haarr has applied paint and sewn textile fragments that hang down like pile from the waxed cloth. The works are large but weigh little. They are suspended a few centimeters away from the wall and can billow slightly if someone walks past them. Apart from these common characteristics, the works vary considerably in color, quality of fabric, and style.

Rya Boat Rugs

An important source of inspiration and reference for the series *Færdaminner* are the traditional Norwegian *rya* boat rugs. (pp. 30–33, 36–37, 42–44) These rugs are an aspect of Norwegian coastal craft traditions with which Haarr has concerned herself during much of her career:

> I've been interested in what kinds of textile production people have been engaged in here in Norway, and I've been interested in the lives of women along the coast. Some of our foremothers were incredibly strong and tough. They weren't delicate flowers sitting indoors with embroidery frames; they were out there in the real world and working hard.
>
> The rya rugs that have captivated my interest are particularly the ones that were made along the coast, especially for use in boats. People also made rya rugs to have in bed and in sleighs, but they often tended to move back and forth between different uses. One that was made for use on a bed would be used in a sleigh when it got worn. Rya rugs are a type of rug that would be woven by women living along the coast, so that their husbands could keep themselves warm at sea, and they often had them in their trousseaux when they got married. The rugs were woven on looms and had a pile on one side, and a pattern that was usually checks or stripes, or a combination of both, on the other. The rug was a sort of artificial sheepskin, hence the pile, but where a real sheepskin would become stiff if you were fishing out at sea in an open boat, the artificial sheepskin, made of wool, would stay soft and keep you warm.

The women that Haarr is referring to were both farmers and housewives, running the homes and farms while their husbands were out at sea fishing. These women wove, knitted, →

Rya boat rugs

Woven mainly from wool, a rya boat rug (*båtrye* in Norwegian) has a pattern on one side and a shaggy pile on the other. Technically, these rugs are constructed from three elements: the warp, the weft, and unspun wool or rags which are knotted onto the warp. Rya boat rugs were important items of equipment in the open fishing boats that were used all along the Norwegian coast. Owners of smallholdings that relied on a combination of farming and fishing made use of these rugs until long after World War II.

The history of rya rugs is obscure, but it is likely that they were being woven in the Nordic region as early as the Viking era. Some researchers believe that Nordic rya rugs and oriental carpets developed as parallel phenomena. The knot used in both weaving traditions is so simple that it could have emerged independently in several different places. Because of the technique used to weave them, rya boat rugs are softer and more flexible than oriental rugs. In addition, the knots are not visible on the smooth side, but are protected and hidden within the weave. Rya boat rugs could be patterned (often with stripes or checks) on the smooth side, but the pile side did not have the patterns and symbols for which oriental carpets are famous. Instead, the long, shaggy pile resembles that of a sheepskin rug.

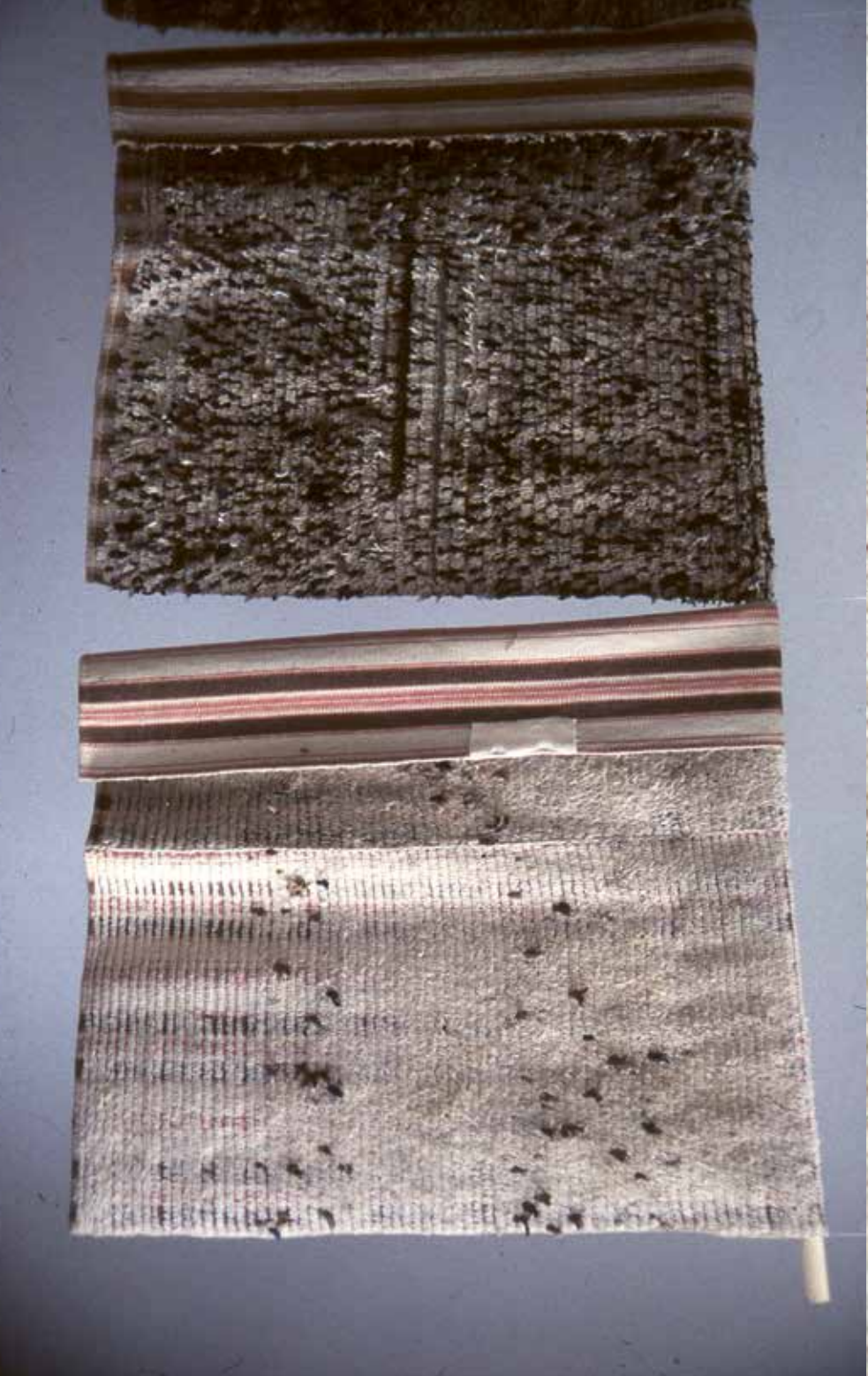
The woolen rya boat rugs were far superior to sheepskin rugs for use in open boats. Over time, salt and damp would rot a sheepskin and the fleece fibers would become matted and lose their insulating properties. In contrast, rya boat rugs improved and became more insulating with use. They were made from three different types of yarn, which were produced to exploit the functional characteristics of fleece from the *utgangersau* sheep: the long outer guard hairs and the soft underwool. A wet rya boat rug could also be easily hung out to dry and it could be washed.

The rug's smooth side is the front and is the rug's structural component. As with the Viking sails,(p. 16) the rugs exploited the lanolin content of the wool. The warp needed to be as water repellent as possible, and so the warp threads were spun as far as possible purely from the long guard hairs, as these had the highest lanolin content. The yarn for the weft was spun from the underwool, which consisted of shorter and much softer fibers. The smooth (warp) side was felted, which bonded the warp and weft and optimized the heat-insulating effect. The pile side, which was turned towards the body during use, was knotted into the warp threads during the weaving process. Rags clipped into strips and woolen yarn were used for the pile, depending on what was available.

Rya rugs were made to last for generations. They were made mainly by women. Large amounts of materials were required to make a rya boat rug, with the wool coming from homebred sheep. One rya boat rug, which would weigh between 17 and 44 pounds (8 to 20 kg) required a year's wool production from about 19 sheep. From the time the wool was plucked from the sheep, it took approximately 110 workdays, or 825 work hours to produce a finished rug. •

Sources: Kjellmo, Ellen: *Båtrya i gammel og ny tid.* [*Rya Boat Rugs in Ancient and Modern Times* – in Norwegian only] Orkana Forlag a.s., Stamsund, 1996

Lightfoot, Amy: *Plan for vern av kystkultur: En presentasjon av båtrya* [*Plan for the Protection of Coastal Culture: A Presentation of the Rya Boat Rug* – in Norwegian only]. Norsk museumsutvikling, Oslo, 2000



baked bread, took care of the livestock, grew potatoes and other vegetables, and climbed onto the roof themselves if the chimney got blocked.

> Rya boat rugs represent an aesthetic that's an extension of this lifestyle, and it's one that interests me because it's so different to the aesthetic we learned at school and which I experienced as coercion. I thought our handicraft lessons were the worst thing ever. There were so many rules, so many things that weren't allowed, and I thought the handicraft teachers were the most horrible people. But these rules don't apply in the world of rya rugs. In that world, there's beauty of a completely different kind. The rya rugs represent a beauty that's about life and death, about love and brutal reality.

Towards the end of the 1980s Haarr moved to Trondheim, where, some years later, she met the U.S. textile researcher Amy Lightfoot. Lightfoot was interested in these distinctive rya rugs, and she told the artist that there were treasure troves of rya rugs that few people had seen, stored in small local museums along the west coast of Norway. At the time Haarr was conducting research for an art exhibition she was organizing together with her colleague, the painter Solrunn Rones. Their aim was to feature contemporary artists who engaged actively with the history of textiles, and following Lightfoot's lead, the two traveled to museums in Kristiansund, Ålesund, and Sunnfjord.

> We got to see a fantastically large number of beautiful old rya rugs. (pp. 36–37) I remember that the conservator at the museum in Ålesund initially was quite skeptical towards us – two artists just showing up at her door – but in the end she was so happy that someone finally showed an interest in the textile collection, that she even let us smoke in the storage room. →

Amy Lightfoot

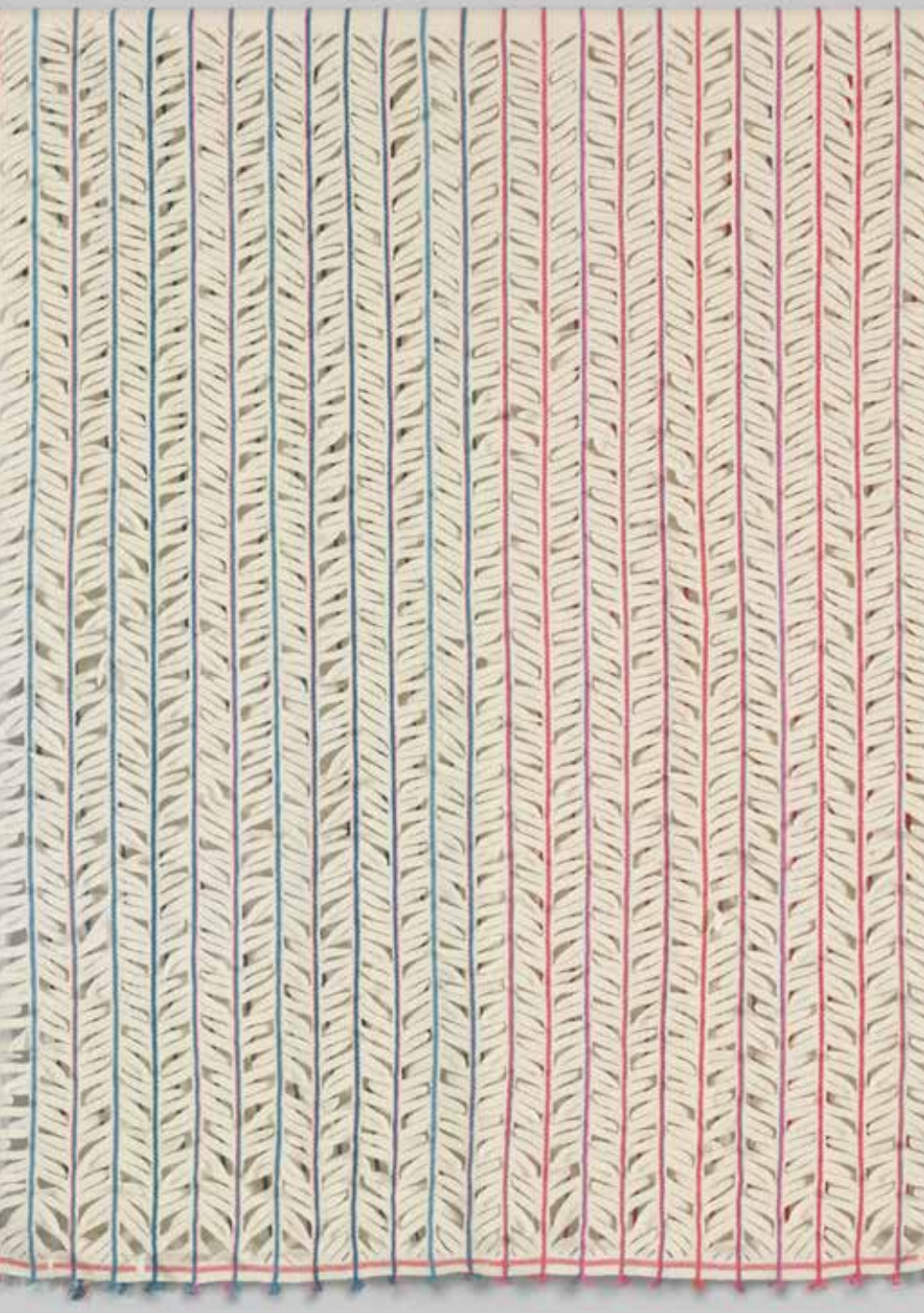
For what we know today about the use of wool for Viking sails and fishermen's clothing, we are hugely indebted to the textile artist and cultural researcher Amy Lightfoot. Norway's coastal inhabitants were completely dependent for their survival on woolen clothing, and knowledge about wool in pre-industrial Norway was both encyclopedic and widespread. This knowledge was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Accordingly, little specific and detailed information about production techniques has survived. With industrialization, the old production methods gradually died out, and knowledge about the properties of sheep wool disappeared along with these traditional practices.

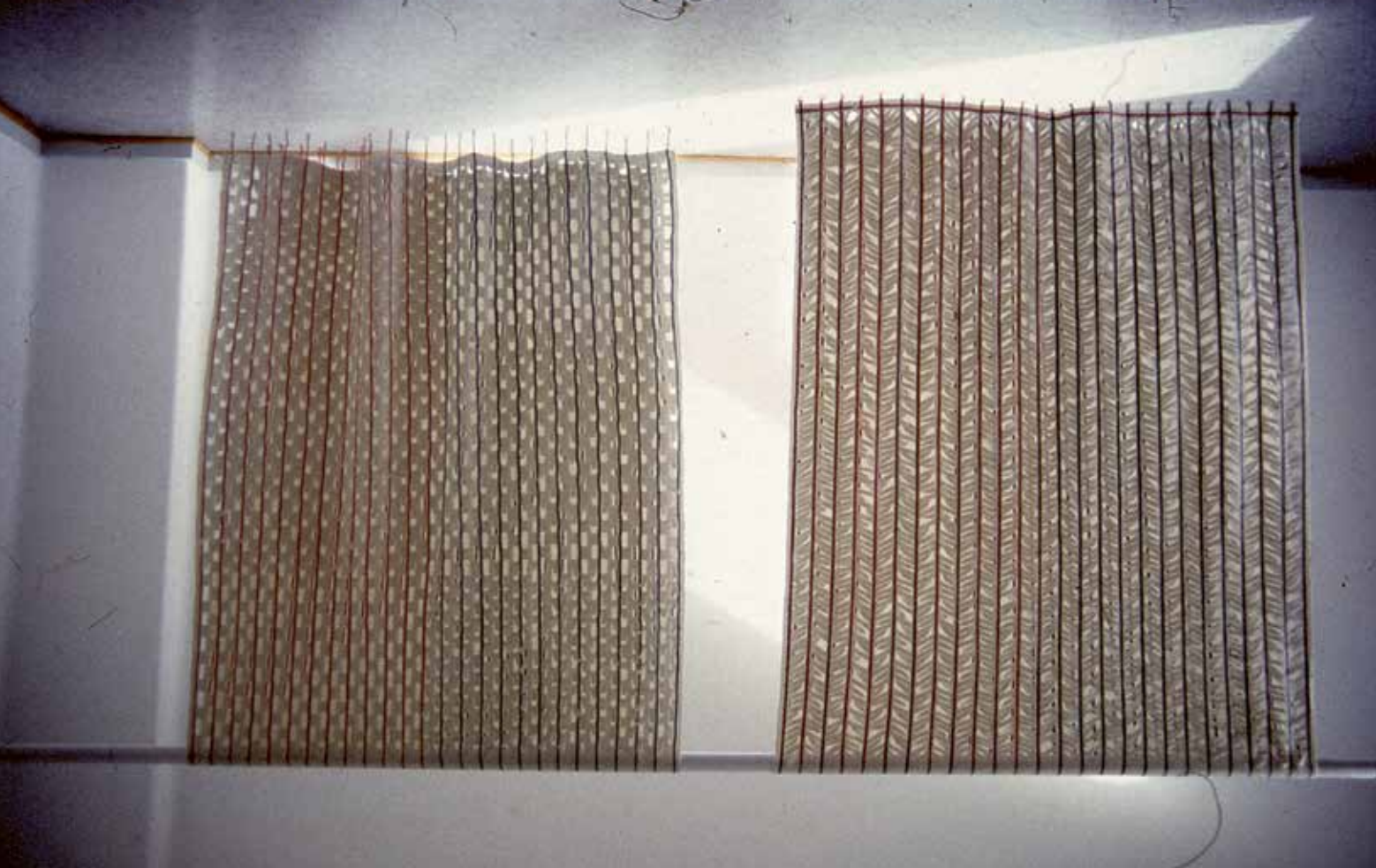
When Lightfoot arrived in Norway from the United States in the 1980s, she embarked on an important project to document domestic woolworking traditions, seeking out informants and reconstructing woolen clothing and sails. She also contributed to saving the *utgangersau* sheep breed from extinction and preserving knowledge about the processing of its wool. In the 1990s, Lightfoot collaborated with the Viking Ship Museum in Roskilde, Denmark on the reconstruction of a woolen sail for the *Sara Kjerstine*, a "tendring" (a type of cargo vessel with five pairs of oars that was used along the coast of Norway from the Middle Ages until around 1850). This sail was the first to have been made using traditional methods for over 140 years.

Lightfoot has also been interested in the mental processes that dictated coastal women's working practices, their working rhythms, their choices of tools and equipment, and how they acquired enormous quantities of raw materials (wool) of a suitable quality for their purpose. During the 1980s and 90s, she interviewed a number of men and women, who were then between 70 and 100 years old, to gather information about textile traditions and the culture of self-sufficiency that evolved and was passed down through generations along the coast. Based on the information learned from these interviews, Lightfoot was able to reconstruct wool clothing and sails, which in turn made it possible to analyze and document the production techniques. In 2005, Lightfoot was granted a life scholarship by the Norwegian state in recognition of her work documenting textile traditions in North Atlantic coastal environments and for her work as head of the Tømmervik Textile Trust. ●

Sources: Lightfoot, Amy: "From heather clad hills to the roof of a medieval church – THE HISTORY OF A WOOLEN SAIL" in *Norwegian Textile Letter*, Vol.II, No.3, May 1996

Lightfoot, Amy: *Plan for vern av kystkultur: En presentasjon av båtrya* [*Plan for the Protection of Coastal Culture: A Presentation of the Rya Boat Rug – in Norwegian only*]. Norsk museumsutvikling, Oslo, 2000





We got so enthusiastic about these rya rugs, and we realized that they had to play the main role in the exhibition we were planning. We got to borrow rya rugs from these museums and we juxtaposed them with works by three contemporary artists: Sissel Calmeyer, (pp. 38–39) Karin Lindell and Kristi Skintveit. The exhibition (pp. 30–33, 39, 42–43) was shown in several museums between Trondheim and Bergen.

What is it that fascinates you about rya rugs?

These rugs contain both beauty and brutal reality. Young women would weave these boat rugs to include them in their bridal chests. On one side a woman would work in her own initials or the name of her future husband – the man who would own the rug in the future. The reason for including a name was to make it possible to identify him if he drowned at sea. In other words, rya boat rugs were woven with love, but also with a rational purpose, and in the knowledge that their owners might die. Having a name woven into the rug would allow him to be identified and buried on home ground. (pp. 42–43)

The varied beauty that these rugs represent is based on this rationality. Making one rya rug would consume four years of an average smallholding's total wool production. The wealthy could afford to splash out on masses of new wool for their rya rugs, and the amount of new wool in a rug tells us something about the financial status of the owner. The poor had to resort to lower quality wool, or supplement it with rags.

My favorite rya rug (p. 44) was made by Elina Hatlen. It includes a whole wardrobe of women's clothing, including stockings and underwear, dressmaking fabric and table linens. It's from Nordfjord and was made

around 1850. Fortunately it's preserved in a museum, but we don't know much about Elina, who made it. She was either a seamstress or she used the whole of her mother's wardrobe after her mother had died. →

RYA RUGS: A cultural-historical encounter between ancient and modern textile art

The exhibition "RYA RUGS: a cultural-historical encounter between ancient and modern textile art" was curated by the artists Elisabeth Haarr and Solrunn Rones, and displayed at the Trøndelag Centre for Contemporary Art in Trondheim; Bryggens Museum in Bergen; the Coastal Museum in Sogn og Fjordane in Florø; Nordmøre Museum in Kristiansund; and Ålesund Art Museum in the course of 1993 and 1994.

The exhibition consisted of historical rya boat rugs and new works by the artists Sissel Calmeyer, Karin Lindell and Kristi Skintveit. Among other things, Sissel Calmeyer's work *Vårklipp/Spring Shearing* (pp. 38–39) paraphrased a type of woolen underblanket known as a *kvitel*, traditionally made in western Norway, particularly in Sunnfjord. In the introduction to the exhibition catalogue, Elisabeth Haarr wrote: "Our aim with this exhibition was to show the close lines of connection between modern textile art and the so-called trivial textile production performed by women along the coast. […] This exhibition focuses on the creative side of these women's work. It will display an aesthetic that is different from what one usually associates with craft textile production. That the visual possibilities of textiles are broader, also in a traditional context, than neatness and beauty. That textiles are capable in the profoundest sense of expressing love, harshness, wildness, and solicitude." ●

Source: *Trøndelag kunstnersenter presenterer RYER: et kulturhistorisk møte mellom eldre og moderne tekstilkunst* [*Trøndelag Centre for Contemporary Art presents RYA RUGS: A cultural-historical encounter between ancient and modern textile art*, in Norwegian only], Trondheim Senteret, 1993

Rya rugs have many similarities to Persian and oriental rugs, but the latter two have visible knots on the reverse, whereas rya rugs are woven in a way that hides the knots inside the weave. Technically this is very advanced, and as a result rya rugs, with their intricate patterns on one side and long pile on the other, do not have a front side and a reverse.

> They were skilled handweavers who knew what they were doing, and they added extra beauty wherever they could. But it's an aesthetic that represents a different type of beauty than the one we associate with the Victorian style – the skillful and pretty, with sweet little stitches and small, cute embroideries – here we're speaking in capital letters. I became completely entranced by the aesthetic that rya boat rugs represent.

From Tradition to Textile Art

You have also been intrigued by the role that traditional practices have played in contemporary textile art – a scene you are also a part of.

> Yes, one could say that modern Norwegian textile art – which started with Frida Hansen (1855–1931) – arises directly from the general production of textiles by women along the Norwegian coast.
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> Hansen originally made a wealthy marriage, but when her husband went bankrupt, she started a small embroidery business. A traditional wool coverlet (*åkle*) was brought in for repair, and she found it so fine that she decided to learn to weave. This journey took her to Kjerstina Hauglum, in Sogn, a famous handweaver at that time, in order to study the craft. Hauglum and Hansen used the old warp-weighted loom (*opstadvev*), a type of loom that had been used along the coast for over a thousand years, and which had always looked more or less the same. It's quite a primitive loom, but

women had nevertheless woven sophisticated coverlets and functional textiles on it. These coverlets look different along the coast with their checks, stripes, and fiery flame stitch patterns.

Frida Hansen

Frida Hansen (1855–1931) was one of the great innovators of Norwegian tapestry and one of the first Norwegian women artists to attract international attention. Hansen's work can be seen as a link between 17th-century tapestry traditions and European Art Nouveau. In 1888, she began an apprenticeship with Kjerstina Hauglum in Lærdal. She was interested in the old warp-weighted looms and in weaving techniques that produced an identical weave on both sides. She made improvements to the traditional warp-weighted loom and designed the type of loom that was later used for tapestry weaving in Norway. She also researched old techniques and experimented with natural plant dyes. Through her updating of traditional weaving techniques, she created a unique style of textile art.

In 1890, Hansen founded the weaving workshop "Frida Hansen's Atelier for Hand-woven Norwegian Rugs" in her hometown of Stavanger. Two years later, she moved to Oslo where she established a weaving and yarn-dyeing workshop, employed assistants, and started producing textiles on a large scale.

In 1897, Hansen took out a patent for her "transparent" weaving technique – a technique that allowed the weaver to switch between densely woven and translucent sections in the same weave. In the same year, Hansen became director of "Norwegian Coverlet and Tapestry Weaving Mill – NABV", a company that would prove highly significant for the development of Norwegian tapestry. In 1898, NABV created the tapestry *The Milky Way*, which is considered a masterpiece of Norwegian Art Nouveau. Hansen's major breakthrough came at the Paris World Fair in 1900, where she won a gold medal for, among other things, *The Milky Way*.

Today, Frida Hansen's transparent weaves and tapestries are found in Norwegian and foreign museum collections, as well as in private collections. ●

Sources: Simonnæs, Anne Sommerin: "Frida Hansen: A Leading Star in European Textile Art", website of the National Museum

"Frida Hansen", in the Great Norwegian Encyclopedia (snl.no, in Norwegian only)

Solberg, Aud Ross, "Veversker og vevnader frå Sogn gjennom 500 år" ["Handweavers and woven textiles from Sogn through 500 years", in Norwegian only]

Nilsen, Sten: "Tekstilhistorie mellom to permer" ["Textile History Between Two Covers", in Norwegian only], Kunst Pluss, no 1, 2017

A warp-weighted loom has a vertical warp and you can weave in the weft where you want. This contrasts with a low-warp loom, where the warp lies horizontally, and you can sit down to weave with treadles and beater and see the pattern that you are weaving in front of you. Hansen modernized the warp-weighted loom by adding treadles and shanks, making the looms easier to weave on. Based on the old techniques used for coverlets, she developed several advanced techniques that made it possible to create complicated compositions on a warp-weighted loom. Hansen's important work is the background to what we call *billedvev* (translated here as "tapestry") in Norway today.

Warp-weighted looms

A warp-weighted loom is a type of vertical loom. It has a simple frame with two beams and is often leaned against a wall. The warp threads hang vertically from a horizontal beam. In order to keep the threads in place, but allow them to be moved when necessary, stones or weights are fastened onto the bottom ends of the threads.

The warp-weighted loom has a very long history, and probably came to Europe from Egypt. The oldest known image of such a loom is from a wall-painting from approximately 1580 BCE. We know that they were used by the Romans, and a small version was found in the Oseberg Ship (a well-preserved Viking ship found near Tønsberg, Norway in 1904). Warp-weighted looms became very widespread in Norway, including in various Sámi cultures and in western Norway. Warp-weighted looms are used for weaving tapestries and *åkle*, the woven coverlets that have been used in Norway since the Middle Ages as bed coverings and on the inside of external walls as both decoration and insulation.

Well-known Norwegian artists including Frida Hansen, Hannah Ryggen, Else Marie Jakobsen and Tove Pedersen have used warp-weighted looms, and Ann Cathrin November Høibo's wall-hanging for the Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C was woven on a warp-weighted loom.[p. 74] ●

Sources: "Oppstadgogn" in the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia* (snl.no, in Norwegian only) and the article "Gjenskaper plagg fra jernalderen" ["Reconstructing clothing from the Iron Age", in Norwegian only] at forskning.no

Hoffmann, Marta: *The Warp-Weighted Loom*, Universitetsforlaget, 1964

"Åkle" in the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia* (snl.no, in Norwegian only)

You can draw a direct line from everyday traditional handweaving practiced in coastal communities to contemporary Norwegian textile art. As a result, what we in a Norwegian context call tapestry (*billedvev*) is very different to what is made in the rest of Europe. Gobelin tapestries, for example, are woven in a different manner. There is no one else who makes tapestries as we do in Norway, and thus I believe this to be the backbone of our textile art. The Norwegian art historian Holger Koefoed once called Norwegian tapestry "the pipe organ of visual art." He may have been right about that.

Travelogues

Haarr did not forget the old rya boat rugs that she had discovered in the 1990s, and years later, after moving to Kristiansand on the southern coast of Norway, she decided to create a series of works concerning the idea of traveling. Given that these rugs are precisely about setting out on a journey, it became natural to use them as an element in the stories she wanted to tell. But she had developed problems with her hands, and she couldn't sew much anymore. The solution was to paint on waxed tablecloths and sew textile fragments onto them. In order to retain contact with the materials she applied the paint directly with her hands.

Both the works [in Washington] are painted with my hands. I can no longer manage to hold a brush very well, so I paint with my fingers instead. That works fine too: you gain a closer, more physical relationship with the material, much like when working with textiles. You can exploit the physical aspect of painting when you have your hands in the paint. If you look at *Jammerbugt* for instance, you can see that I have been agitated, it's painted in an agitated way, with powerful movements.

Haarr has taken the word "Færdaminne" (translated here as "Travelogue") from the title of Aasmund Olavsson Vinje's book *Ferdaminni frå Sumaren 1860* (*Travel Memories from Norway 1860*) (1861).

> I wanted to create a series of works that were about my travels, as well as my inner journeys. I've moved a lot in my life, and my relationship with landscape is quite strong, as it probably is for most Norwegians – our relationship with the weather, the wind, and all that. In my youth I'd read *Ferdaminni* by Vinje, and at school we sang "Now I see again the same mountains and valleys."[1] The book is the earliest travel book ever written about Norway, or at least the earliest by a Norwegian, and I remember that I was very moved by it – the fact that he goes back to places he'd been before, and so on. He was a great poet. So I found *Færdaminner* to be a good umbrella title for the works I was making, but I spelled it with the Norwegian letter Æ, because to spell it in the same way as Vinje had, would suggest that perhaps I was getting above myself. I also added a subtitle to each of the works that refers to what the image is about. The two for the embassy are called *OH Gunta!* and *Jammerbugt*.

Turbulent Sea (*Jammerbugt*)

> My husband and I used to go on camping trips, and we often went to Denmark and camped close to Jammerbugt ["Bay of Misery"], in the northwest of Jutland, a bay where incredibly many ships have sunk. We had been in Tønder to see an exhibition, and while there I saw a painting by a Danish painter called Jens Søndergaard.[2] The painting showed people standing on the beach looking out over the sea, a sea that is

1 "No ser eg atter slike fjell og dalar" is the first stanza of Vinje's poem "Ved Rondane", first published in *Ferdaminni*, and known to most Norwegians as a song set to music by Edvard Grieg.

2 The painting is called "Hav i storm" ("Sea in a Storm"), 1946.

gradually ceasing to be turbulent. (p. 45) You can tell from the colors and the sky that the sea is in the process of settling down. There are some people standing on the beach and one person, almost a pale blue, is leaving the beach and coming towards you. That painting made a very strong impression on me. I've lived by the sea for many years, and people close to me have lost family members at sea. So I wanted to make a *Travelogue* about that experience.

This *Travelogue* is actually painted on a very cheerful waxed tablecloth, with small birds and flowers. It was black originally, and I painted over it with black and yellow, normally an ugly color combination, and then I allowed some birds and flowers from the pattern on the wax cloth to remain. The pile is made of umbrella fabric, and perhaps I'm the only one who knows or sees it that way, but it's about the idea of protection. An umbrella protects you from the wet, the pile protects against the wet, and in this lies an idea of caring. A sort of togetherness and empathy, a greeting from me. That's what I've tried to convey. It's a serious work, and I hope that I relayed the story without needing to tell the whole backstory, which is my own, but that it's possible to understand that it has something to do with a turbulent sea.

Declarations of Love (*OH Gunta!*)

On her honeymoon in 2003, Haarr visited the historic art school Bauhaus Dessau. A photograph of her from that trip hangs on a wall in her studio. Newlywed and happy she stands wearing a checked dress in front of Walter Gropius's grid-like facade, (p. 61) and the grid pattern is also repeated in the sidewalk she's standing on. Back then, Bauhaus had just recently been added to UNESCO's World Heritage Site list, and to a large extent the buildings looked as they did when the school was in use.

The Bauhaus

The Bauhaus was a German school for the fine and applied arts that was founded by the architect Walter Gropius in 1919. The school existed from 1919 to 1933 in three different locations: Weimar (1919–1924), Dessau (1926–1932), and Berlin (1932–1933). In 1933, the school was closed by the Nazis. The ideas, methods and teaching programs of the Bauhaus became very widespread and influential in educational institutions all over the world.

The school became famous for its approach to design, which attempted to unify the principles of mass production with individual artistic vision and strove to combine aesthetics with everyday function.

The Bauhaus became extremely influential on industrial design, art and architecture. The aim was to create simple utilitarian shapes and avoid the copying of historical styles. Many famous artists, architects and theorists were associated with the school, including Vasilij Kandinskij, Paul Klee, Lázló Moholy-Nagy, Johannes Itten, Anni Albers, Josef Albers and Marcel Breuer.

The school wanted to build bridges between craft, industry and art, and created a new pedagogical method and a new teaching program, among other things by introducing a common preliminary course for all first-year students. The school had workshops for glass painting, printmaking, ceramics, metalworking, theatre design, woodworking, typography, painting and weaving. In 1927, architecture was added to the curriculum.

The complex of buildings in Dessau was designed by Walter Gropius and completed in 1926. Few other buildings have been as significant for the development of modern architecture. The complex was divided into four parts according to function, and an uninterrupted glass façade extended across all three floors and along the whole length of the building. There was a complete absence of ornamentation throughout the complex. The overall impression was of transparency, lightness and flatness. This new style of monumental design went further than the aesthetic ideas prevailing at the time and contributed to establishing the Bauhaus as an icon of Modernism. ●

Source: "Bauhaus", in the Great Norwegian Encyclopedia (snl.no, in Norwegian only) and Wikipedia

Among the other visitors and students, Haarr walked the corridors, climbed the worn staircases, and visited the canteen in the basement – taking in the energy of the school. The famous masters' houses were newly restored, and pensioner volunteers were eager to provide information and excited about people's interest in the school. Haarr later sewed fabric from the dress she was wearing that day into the work *Færdaminne – Dessau* (*Travelogue – Dessau*) (2013) **(pp. 62–63)**, which is thematically closely linked to her work *OH Gunta!*

You mentioned earlier that rya boat rugs were in many ways declarations of love to seafaring men. Your work Færdaminne – OH Gunta! *is also a declaration of love from you to the Bauhaus master Gunta Stölzl. Can you tell us more about her and your visit to Dessau?*

> In one of my Bauhaus books, I'd seen a photograph from 1927 of the textile class standing grinning on a staircase, **(p. 54)** and there I was inside the school, going up the staircase myself; I was about to swoon! I saw the worn-down steps, and thought that this was where they walked, all those stars. These students who later became so important for the art world went up and down these stairs, this was where they talked and debated. Think of everything that was going on in these rooms and outside them! I thought about all the woven fabrics, and about Paul Klee, who was teaching the textile class, everything he learned from them and everything they learned from him. And then I thought of Gunta Stölzl, whom I admire very much. I can't call her a role model, but she is an artist I hold in high esteem. So the visit was a powerful experience, particularly seen in light of the school's history. It was the first institution to be closed by the Nazis. That shows how provocative art can be, even when it is only about making something beautiful for other people and making their life more comfortable. →

Gunta Stölzl

Gunta Stölzl was the first woman to be master of the weaving workshop at the Bauhaus. Stölzl played a decisive role in the development of the weaving workshop and in the gradual increase in the understanding of textiles as an independent artistic medium. This shift in perspective became clear when the Bauhaus moved from Weimar to Dessau in 1925. The new premises gave access to better machinery and dyeing facilities and the upgrade opened up opportunities for broader experimentation with textiles and textile techniques. In 1931, Stölzl herself wrote:

[…] From now on, there begins a clear and final distinction between two areas of education that initially were fused with each other: The 'development of functional textiles' for use in interiors (prototypes for industry) and 'speculative experimentation' with materials, form and color in tapestries and carpets.

Together with her colleague Annie Albers, Stölzl worked to bring out the characteristics of different fabrics through manipulation of the raw materials. With a modernist approach to experimentation and by adapting abstract designs for weaving, Stölzl and Albers moved the medium away from its utilitarian aspect towards a classical aesthetic understanding of tapestries as autonomous art objects. By approaching the materials and techniques with an emphasis on structure and form, they established the foundation for further experimentation in the direction of abstraction and installation. ●

Sources: Jølbo, Marte Danielsen, "Mot en myk logikk" in *Ode til en vaskeklut* ["Towards a Soft Logic" in *Ode to a Dishcloth*, in Norwegian only], Grapefrukt forlag, 2017, pp. 110–129

Stölzl, Gunta: "Die Entwicklung der Bauhaus Weberei" – The Development of the Bauhaus Weaving Workshop, *bauhaus*, 1931

What is it about Stölzl that causes you to hold her in such high esteem?

The first work I saw by her was really a sample, a tapestry sample, based on the color theories of Johannes Itten. It was red, with rainbow shapes and some squares that showed simultaneous contrasts, along with other examples of Itten's theory about color. It was a giant sample! **(p. 55)** I've also seen other tapestries, in photographs, and also her watercolors, and the seats she made for chairs by Gropius. I thought they were incredibly stylish! And I liked her work better than I liked

that of the other star of the workshop, Anni Albers, who of course became very famous in the U.S., while Gunta has been a bit overlooked.

Gunta had an unusual backstory. If I'm not mistaken, she was a nurse during World War I, and no doubt everyone involved in that war was scarred by the experience. She married a Jew, and when the school was closed by the Nazis, she travelled back to Switzerland and had her own workshop there. While attending the Bauhaus school, she was made a teacher. And on her ID card she crossed out "Mistress", which appeared under her name, and wrote MASTER. I thought that had style; there was no messing around there. A brilliant artist.

I've been very interested in the Bauhaus in general, but Gunta is the star. I find it really gratifying that Gunta will hang in the Washington embassy, because she's not so well known in the U.S. All the Bauhaus artists that went to the U.S. became famous there, but Gunta did not go, she went home to Switzerland instead. Perhaps the Norwegian embassy can market this Swiss artist to the Americans, or perhaps some Swiss diplomats will come to visit and be happy to see the work.

Could you tell us a little more about what interests you about the Bauhaus?

First of all, I liked how the school was structured. I mean the actual teaching method: the fact that one had an artistic director and a workshop master for each department. The teaching, perhaps especially the first-year teaching, is very exciting. It was a kind of foundation year where they did many experiments, including in composition and color, which is enormous fun. You could play around and explore all the exciting

and enjoyable things that art is based on. That's something I recognize from my own studies at the National College of Art and Design, in Oslo, where they also had a preliminary year that was structured in a similar way to the Bauhaus, but not quite as playful. But I have to say, I am very happy with my own art education.

In addition, I like the fact that they appointed Paul Klee as artistic director of the textile department. Of course, he didn't know anything about textiles, but he learned a huge amount and you can see that in his pictures. In his striped paintings for instance, it's clear that he's been in the company of the textile women. He was also very interested in Armenian textiles and ecclesiastical art. And his way of working was transmitted to the students; it had a two-way effect.

I think it's fantastic that they all had the same preliminary training, and that the students in the textile department learned the same things as the students who, for example, wanted to become architects. It's one thing to trust in the two-way effect that this brought about, but it also shows that they didn't make the distinction that art historians are probably still being taught, that there are minor and important forms of art. We are still struggling with this idea that architecture, painting, and sculpture are the major forms of art, and that other art forms are perceived as minor, like textiles and other such material-based "nonsense," are placed in a corner. It's the same in music, the idea that country music is a minor form, something completely different from the major arts.

But remember, the Bauhaus only lasted from 1919 to 1933, so they weren't active for many years. Together with some Russian artists, who also emigrated to the U.S., they transformed the contemporary art scene.

Think about how they interacted with and influenced each other – what a gang of amazing people! The fact that they were doing things together must have whipped up the atmosphere quite a bit, which is probably why what they made is so interesting.

Because this is what we do – we always build while standing on the shoulders of others – we learn from others, we learn from history, and we learn from the people we meet. We are constantly learning; it's fantastically enjoyable. That whole genius thing, that's just nonsense. •

To Reach the Top of a Mountain
Ann Cathrin November Høibo

Dreams Ahead (2020–21) **(pp. 4–5, 64–67, 102–103)** is the title of Ann Cathrin November Høibo's monumental, handwoven wall hanging, made especially for the Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C. Naturally gray wool forms the background of the abstract tapestry – a coarse, uneven surface that can be experienced almost as a gray wall, with large fields of unbleached white and charcoal gray pressing in from the sides, not unlike Norwegian skerries in springtime, when these small rocky islands are sprinkled with areas of snow that contrast with the dark rocks. Distributed across the tapestry's surface are flashes of color: small, energetic drawings in bright orange and green, ice blue, pink, and pastel yellow.

The tapestry is without doubt the largest November Høibo has ever woven, measuring 216 in. high by 119 in. wide (5.5x 3 m.). She made the work by hand all by herself, without any help from assistants – a quest that took her seven months of daily labor at the loom. The artist also had to rent a larger studio in order to produce on such a large scale, so she was given six-months access to a venerable gymnasium in the old city quarter of Posebyen, in Kristiansand, which provided a 3,660 sq. ft. (340 sq. m.) room to work in. →

When we visit November Høibo in her temporary studio in February 2021, light is flooding through the high windows. As the artist says to us:

> This is a fantastic space to work in. Its dimensions change what it's possible for me to make. I can produce bigger things here and work on several projects at the same time. The high ceiling gives me more headspace, I can walk around and move freely here.

Half of the space is occupied by another large project – two enormous stage curtains destined for Agder Prison. These are also 216 in. (5 m.) high each, and together are almost 4,000 in. (100 m.) wide. The stage curtains are being machine woven elsewhere on jacquard looms, in accordance with the artist's instructions. And although they are not handmade, this project has helped the artist to understand how to work in large dimensions. In the other half of the studio stands the large warp-weighted loom on which November Høibo has finished about half of the handwoven tapestry that will be dispatched to the Washington, D.C. embassy. Initially, she had envisaged making two panels, each 60 in. (1.5 m.) wide – a little like the work created by Synnøve Anker Aurdal (p. 92) that hangs in a Stavanger bank built in the 1960s – but she is happy that this loom enabled her to create something more monumental in scale.

> I wanted to see if it was possible to weave the tapestry in one whole piece. This was a new challenge for me, and it gave the project a specific focus.

The loom that November Høibo is working on was built for the tapestry workshop A/S Norsk Billedvev in Oslo, which reproduced historic textiles for the Norwegian Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, and which was also employed in the 1950s to weave the enormous tapestries for Oslo City Hall. When the workshop closed in the 1970s, the loom was given to one of

the handweavers. Today it belongs to her son, Per Hoelfeldt Lund. He runs a yarn-spinning business in Grimstad, from where November Høibo also purchases her *spælsau* yarn.

> I've been buying yarn from there for the last 10 years, and Per has shown me this loom from time to time. In their attic it took up the whole space and felt overwhelming, but here in the gymnasium it looks quite majestic. **(p. 74)**

Together with friends, November Høibo dismantled the loom and reinstalled it in her studio without any instructions.

> There were three of us and we moved the loom in a small van – the longest pieces sticking out of the boot. It was Astri Kvaale who also cut up all the yarn, and Morten Michalsen. He created a system using different-colored tape and labelled all the parts so that we would be able to reassemble the loom without further assistance. Apart from that, there's been no practical instructions on how to operate the loom. I'm learning as I weave, and this is also a process I enjoy. At the same time, I've realized that all the different looms have basic things in common.
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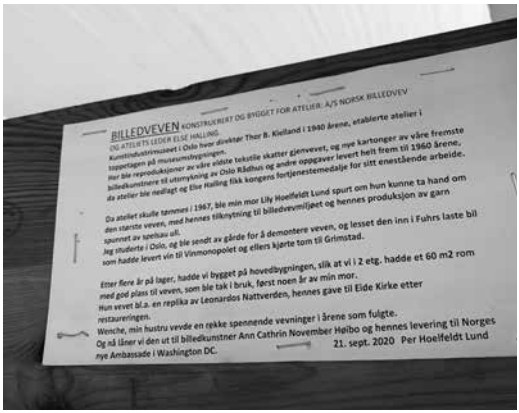
> What is fascinating about looms is how practical they are; they are actually not so complicated. It kind of reminds me of Norwegian coast life with boats and their rope systems, finding temporary solutions and making readjustments. Like in weaving, there's a flow of rigging and practical details. What is special with this wooden loom is that we can walk into it and stand inside working on the warp threads and the metal weights that keeps them in place. **(p. 77)** It's an old industrial loom, made so that the woven fabric can be inspected, to check the colors, and patterns, and so on. This loom with its giant size is as reliable as a workhorse. →



The Loom

The loom that Ann Cathrin November Høibo used to make *Dreams Ahead* is a warp-weighted loom with a long history. The owner, Per Hoelfeldt Lund, explains:

"Loom designed and built for the workshop: A/S Norsk Billedvev and the workshop's manager Else Halling.

[From t]he Norwegian Museum of Decorative Arts and Design, where the director Thor B. Kielland, in the 1940s, established a workshop on the top floor of the museum building.

Here reproductions were woven of our oldest textile treasures, and [tapestries were woven from] new cartoons by our leading artists for the decoration of Oslo City Hall and other commissions right up until the 1960s, when the workshop was closed down and Else Halling was awarded the King's Medal of Merit for her outstanding work.

When the workshop was to be emptied in 1967, my mother, Lily Hoelfeldt Lund, was asked if she could take care of the largest loom, in view of her links with the handweaving community and her production of yarn spun from the wool of *spælsau* sheep.

I was studying in Oslo, and was dispatched to dismantle the loom, and I loaded it into Fuhr's truck, which had delivered wine to the Wine Monopoly and otherwise would have driven empty to Grimstad.

After several years in storage, we had extended our main building, so that we had a room of 645 sq.ft. (60 sq.m.) on the upper floor with plenty of space for the loom, which was put into use, initially for several years by my mother.

Among other things, she wove a replica of Leonardo's Last Supper, which was her gift to Eide Church following its restoration.

Wenche, my wife, wove a number of exciting tapestries in the following years.

And now we are lending it to the artist Ann Cathrin November Høibo in connection with her commission for Norway's new embassy in Washington, D.C." ●

Source: Per Hoelfeldt Lund, 21 September 2020

November Høibo weaves in an unconventional manner – sort of back to front – combining thick and thin yarns of various qualities and using only a fork as a tool.

I use my own method: normally one looks at the front while weaving, but I have the backside of the tapestry facing me. From the beginning I wasn't very interested in following any rules, so this method has evolved over the years, just by doing it. And I see that my skills have improved. For me, weaving is a lifetime project.

I don't follow the regularity in the weft, but concentrate on specific areas at a time. The weaving often grows as small hills or waves. Sometimes it also reminds me of playing Tetris: putting in threads where they're needed so the whole fabric is connected. I get to think a lot while weaving, and I find it liberating to work so freely without a plan. Or rather, I have a "sense of a plan," but it's not stated expressly. Weaving is like life – you can make plans, but it doesn't always turn out as you imagined.

I use threads of different thicknesses and qualities. I touch the threads to feel them and get a sense of where they can fit best. The threads get locked into the weave and they settle down in a natural way. Intuitively I can leave an end of a thread on the front of the work. There's nothing that is right or wrong, but I have to stay aware so that the thick threads won't push the warp too much to one of the sides, and I keep the warp as straight as possible by controlling the evenness with the thinner threads. My tapestries will always end up a bit uneven and with intended irregularities.

The thing with the fork is a technique I learned from Else Marie Jakobsen, who also wove like that. It's a simple tool and easy to get hold of. (p. 95) I take whatever

fork I can find. It's just important that it's not too heavy. Also, I need to have a lot of them, because I leave them all over the place. At lunchtime, the other people who have studios in this building can seldom find a fork.

November Høibo doesn't make sketches as part of her process, but deems her previous works as preparations for her next one. When faced with the commission for Washington, however, she did attempt to sketch, but rapidly abandoned it.

I wasn't getting anywhere with the sketching, I just got stuck. So, I discarded them and went back to trusting my own way of working. It's really enjoyable to understand that I can trust my own process and do what I know will work. I try to let go of fear and control, and to trust my own gut. This applies to all my choices, also of color. I love all colors, but not all color combinations. Sometimes I use combinations I really don't like, because they can work surprisingly well in the composition. Like intense greens with orange and red, for example.

Usually, November Høibo buys her colorful yarns from a small store in Madrid, bringing with her empty suitcases and filling them with rayon and cotton. This year, however, because of the coronavirus pandemic, she got some help from the Norwegian embassy in Madrid to buy the yarn for *Dreams Ahead*. In the studio, the big loom is surrounded by bundles of gray wool yarn, skeins, and pre-cut threads of colorful cotton **(pp. 79–81, 87–89)** – creating a semicircle of materials around her workstation.

My surroundings are very important to me. It's also important which colors are placed next to each other in the studio. One color can suddenly "pop" when it's lying next to another color. I'm therefore not so keen

> on having colors hanging according to the color circle. When they hang more randomly, they suddenly glow a little differently.

Some of the colored yarn can already be found in the tapestry, even though November Høibo is using mostly gray wool. Making this slow work, she has plenty of time to weave in impressions from her surroundings, the seasons, and personal experiences.

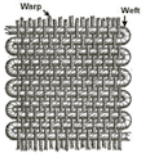
> The tapestry takes in life. I respond to my environment – the seasons, the light, and my shifting moods. There are many emotions lying in these threads. Some days it's incredibly good just to sit here and work, while other days it's very lonely and frustrating and boring. It feels different to work on this after Christmas and after the U.S. election. It was quite draining in late autumn, when everything was dark, gloomy, and somehow very chaotic – it's reflected in the dark colors at the top of the tapestry. Now the colors are brighter but cooler. We haven't had this kind of white winter here for many years, with crisp snow, an unchanging blue sky, and a bracing breeze. The snow has made its way into the tapestry and it's also possible to see the clear sky and colors. And soon it will get warmer…

Mountains and Landscape

The gray wool yarn used in both warp and weft came from the spælsau breed of sheep. It's unusual to see such a valuable material used for the structural component of a tapestry. Traditionally, the warp is not visible – it is a supporting structure. In this work, the warp consists of 750 threads, meaning that 6,560 yd. (6,000 m.) of yarn were used for the warp alone.

> The reason that I began to make such good-looking warps was that I didn't have the stamina to weave a full-length tapestry, so it was a strategy to exhibit the

warps and make them a significant part of the works. The warp is as important as the weft. Ten years ago, producing this mountain of an artwork would have seemed completely unrealistic. But a year ago I made a tapestry consisting of four large pieces (pp. 98–99) for an exhibition at [the gallery] STANDARD (OSLO). I then felt that I had gotten over a threshold, that I could cope with a kind of marathon – like this project. It's not an option to give up, and I can't wait to be liberated when I'm done. →



How to weave – warp and weft

"All weaving is the interlacing of two distinct groups of threads at right angles. Wherever a fabric is formed in a different manner, we are not dealing with weaving. […]

The horizontal-vertical intersecting of the two separate systems of thread is of great consequence for the formative side of weaving. […] The threads grouped vertically or lengthwise in the fabric are the warp threads; those running horizontally or crosswise are the filling threads. By collective terms they are the warp and the weft, or filling, or woof, or pick. The warp threads are stationary in the process of weaving, while the filling threads are in motion, which indicates that the weaver for the most part deals with the filling of threads and which may explain the greater number of terms for them.

In the plain weave, this intersecting of warp and weft takes place in the simplest possible manner. A weft thread moves alternately over and under each warp thread it meets on its horizontal course from one side of the warp to the other; returning, it reverses the order and crosses over those threads under which it moved before and under those over which it crossed. This is the quintessence of weaving." ●

Source: Albers, Anni: *On Weaving*. New expanded edition, The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, 2017, pp. 23–24

To keep track of the many threads, November Høibo made them into braids when starting the tapestry.

> I don't know yet if this will be the top or the bottom of the tapestry, and perhaps I'll keep the braids when it's finished. Many great characters have braids, and I'm also inspired by the ancient traditions of weaving in many cultures. There's something very feminine and strong that I like about it.

She hesitates a little when we ask if she has any role models:

> If I have any role models? I am, of course, inspired by weavers, so it's impossible not to mention Hannah Ryggen, due to her energy and attitude. It was really a bit because of her that I began to weave. I had a very physical reaction the first time I read about her in a women's magazine in a dentist's waiting room. The large tapestry by Miró (p. 93) that hangs in Barcelona made a big impact on me when I was very young and has possibly been a subconscious source of inspiration. But more and more, nature is becoming my biggest role model.

A warm gray and a darker charcoal gray, along with a large section in white, are the main colors in November Høibo's tapestry at the embassy.

> When I think about it, there are a lot of rocks and stones in this tapestry – our gray mountains, quite simply. My only flight this year was to Stryn to visit the weaving mill that produced the digitally woven stage curtain for Agder Prison. I was reminded that the Norwegian landscape I flew over resembles the patterns and the colors of my tapestries. The mountain, and its cracks and fissures – its nerves in a way – and small lakes and snow. As we've talked about, I control things to some →

Hannah Ryggen and Else Marie Jakobsen

Ann Cathrin November Høibo's woven works engage in a direct dialogue with a long line of historical developments in Norwegian textile traditions. She herself was a student of the textile artist Else Marie Jakobsen, who in turn was inspired by artists such as Hannah Ryggen and Frida Hansen.

While Frida Hansen (1855–1931) was the first artist in Norway to unify art and craft, Hannah Ryggen (1894–1970) was the first artist to use tapestry to comment on political events in her own time. Ryggen was also the first artist to have a textile work accepted for the Autumn Exhibition (an important annual exhibition in Norway), in 1964. In the same year, she represented Norway at the Venice Biennale.

Ryggen trained initially as a painter but decided early in her career to switch to hand-weaving, a discipline in which she was self-taught. She and her husband Hans Ryggen lived on a smallholding near Trondheim and it was here that she wove her tapestries. She dyed her own yarn and would start weaving without having made preliminary sketches or having a completely formed idea of the final image. She was strongly politically engaged and was one of the few artists in Norway to create resistance images during World War II. She is famous for her monumental works, of which one of the most well-known is *We Are Living on a Star*, which was created for the Government Quarter in 1958 and which survived the terror attack of July 22, 2011 almost unscathed.

Else Marie Jakobsen's (1927–2012) important contributions to the fields of art and tapestry had their origin in Ryggen's motto: "Tapestry's way is the heart, the hands and the eyes". Like Ryggen, she often addressed political themes in her tapestries. One of her masterpieces – *The Red Thread* – which measures about 969 sq.ft. (90 sq.m.), is Norway's largest tapestry. It hangs in the Science Building at the University of Bergen. The work, which contains several stylistic references to specific artists and historical periods, is a celebration of handweaving and women artists in Norway. Another important work by Jakobsen, *Dromedarene og tekstilkunsten/The Dromedaries and Textile Art*, hangs at the Norwegian parliament building in Oslo. In this work, from 1994, she launches a lacerating attack on how art historians have served as gatekeepers, attributing arbitrarily different values to textile art and painting. ●

Sources: Kunstnerforbundet's website on Høibo's exhibition "Flukt Forover" [Escape Forward – in Norwegian only]

Nilsen, Sten: "Tekstilhistorie mellom to permer" ["Textile History Between Two Covers", in Norwegian only], Kunst Pluss, no 1, 2017

extent, but the pattern unfolds of its own accord. So this tapestry is definitely organic and very much linked to nature – a bit like how water finds its own course.

November Høibo was based in Oslo for a long time, and she has also lived in New York City. Some years ago, however, she moved back to her hometown of Kristiansand, on the southern coast of Norway.

Has your art changed since you moved to a different landscape?

Yes, I think so. Perhaps that is something that will show in my work, but over time. Like the difference between working in a small or large studio – it's different living in a small or big city. Living here in Kristiansand changes my frame of reference, and living here does something to how I see the light and colors. This year, having been so slow, has also changed something. I've gotten interested in tiny details that I haven't seen properly before, because I didn't have time to pay attention to them. Flower buds and structures in leaves, for example, or how birds get on with their work all day. It's important to also think locally: one doesn't necessarily need to travel so far. Since I haven't gone anywhere for a long time, even Kristiansand has for brief moments felt like a big city. The buildings have become bigger.

While November Høibo has been working on this project, the world has been marked by the pandemic and lockdowns. With varying degrees of willingness, many people have had to reduce their levels of activity.

It is quite an experience to stay home all the time. Before, I never really had time to unpack properly, and I always had the small (less than 100 ml.) shampoo bottles ready to take in my hand luggage. The last ten years have gone by in a flash, with nonstop travel and

exhibitions. In February 2020, I had an exhibition titled "Hvis verden spør, så er svaret nei" ("If the World Asks, The Answer is No"), because I had planned to go into hibernation. I couldn't bear the thought of boarding another flight, and then there were suddenly no flights to board. The world actually closed down.

So, this project would have been complicated and stressful to make back in 2018 or 2019 for instance, as I would have multitasked more and would have needed more time to complete it. But now I can just concentrate on weaving. To get the opportunity to make such a tapestry, something really challenging, over time is fantastic. Now I'm working with a different focus. My tempo has slowed. I've also become more preoccupied with the actual weaving. Previously, I often combined sculptures and readymades with the weavings, but there's less of that now. It could have something to do with age – as I get older my work develops. All factors play a part. All the time.

It's not only the pandemic that has made November Høibo slow down her tempo. The loom itself has its own logic that she has to comply with.

This tapestry is so vast that it forces me to work in a different style. Previously, I worked more hectically, but these days I allow myself to use a whole day to roll up the tapestry onto the cloth beam, and to tie and untie all the knots for the weights one by one. And I tell myself that this is enough for today, so I keep my strength to continue again tomorrow. It's a grown-up approach; it feels healthier.

I'm in the studio every day, but I try to take some time off on Sundays. It gets cold to sit here for hours, and I try to have proper routines in order to persevere. →


2020

> I prioritize sleep, I walk to the studio to get warm, and I eat and hydrate properly. Once a week I have a yoga lesson with a tutor in the studio, which is appropriate since it's a gymnasium. It's about finding a balance. I have to be in good shape to work with handweaving. Actors understand this: they exercise regularly and eat well.

The titles of November Høibo's works often refer to the artist's own life – such as her solo exhibition "36," in which all the works were given the title *Untitled (36)*, and which took place in the year she celebrated her thirty-sixth birthday. Or the exhibition title "Hvis verden spør, så er svaret nei" ("If the World Asks, the Answer is No") that we have already discussed. About the background for the work at the embassy – *Dreams Ahead* – November Høibo explains:

> I think it's easier and more fun to work on projects if they have a working title. *Dreams Ahead* came to me immediately – also because this is a dream project. Everything felt pretty hopeless when the commission came: to weave a tapestry for a place with so much political turbulence, in the midst of an election campaign, and in the beginning of a pandemic. The title therefore came to be about long-term perspectives. The tapestry will hang in Washington, D.C. for a long time, and thus it's about hope. •


ALBUM

The Supporter and the Supported
Eline Mugaas

Five terrazzo bookrests in green, pink, brown, blue, and gray are displayed on a low, sturdy, steel shelf. (pp. 104–105, 132–133) The bookrests are sculptures. Variations in shape, color, and stone pattern give each of them a unique character. They are heavy and they are also made for displaying books. When an opened book is placed on one of the bookrests, parts of the sculpture are no longer visible, but as a bookrest, it now fulfills its function as an object made to support and present something else. This duality between sculpture and functional object is something artist Eline Mugaas plays on deliberately.

On the shelf beneath the sculptures lie stacks of books by and about a range of artists. These books have been purchased by Mugaas for a nascent art library at the Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C. She says of her selection:

> The library will be allowed to evolve and change over time. It's okay if people swap which books are lying open, the ones displayed on the bookrests. And there's room for more books. All the books I purchased are by or about artists connected to the Norwegian art scene. This is somewhat limiting, because there are many artists who haven't had a book made about them yet. Future employees of the embassy may perhaps have interests that are completely different from mine – and there's space for their books too.

Together the five bookrests form a colorful group in terrazzo. Terrazzo is a material that is often used for floors and stairs in public buildings – in surfaces that must withstand heavy wear. Mugaas has been interested in the material for several years, collecting images of terrazzo floors. (pp. 111–113) In her new works, she draws our attention to terrazzo as an actual art material.

> I think it's interesting to disrupt hierarchical notions about materials, what's thought of as an art material and what's really made for flooring. The bookrests would have been something completely different if they had been made of marble, for example.

By creating art from an industrial flooring material, the artist alters conventional conceptions about what art is and what constitutes an "autonomous art object." The ordinary, everyday material terrazzo, contributes to emphasizing an ambivalence in the sculptures: they both resemble and actually are bookrests. Accordingly, they switch between being objects of art and of utility.

To put it another way, Mugaas overturns established hierarchies in her practice. Support structures that we rarely notice, but which are completely essential for making something else visible or allowing it to function, get to play the main role in the artist's work.

Terrazzo

Terrazzo is a composite material consisting of cement mixed with stone chippings. Pigments can be added to color the mixture. Terrazzo can be cast in different thicknesses. After it hardens, the surface is ground and polished so that the stones are revealed, giving the material its familiar patterned appearance.

There are examples of terrazzo being used as far back as ancient Egypt, but the variety in use today emerged in Venice in the 18th century, where discarded marble fragments were combined with cement. The inclusion of stone makes terrazzo laborious to grind and polish, and it was only after electric grinding machines were invented in around 1920 that the material began to be used to the extent we see today. Terrazzo's popularity soared as a cheap and extremely durable material for use in stairways and communal areas in public buildings. It can also be used in wet rooms and industrial buildings. ●

Source: "The Origin of Terrazzo Tiles" in Tile Magazine

The autonomous art object

"The autonomous art object" concerns the modernist conception of autonomy as the art object's absolute difference from other objects. Autonomy has to do with artworks being freed from the paradigm of function and therefore separated from other discourses in society (an artwork's function is in many ways to be free to have no function). During the modern and secularized society of the 1960s, it became important for artists, academics and philosophers to maintain the artwork's autonomy and art's boundaries toward other discourses in order to ensure art's elevated status in society, and its privilege as freed from the rationality of purpose. However, when the boundaries between the different art forms – as well as between art and other aesthetic disciplines and society overall – opened up, this way of viewing autonomy became problematic. •

Source: Jølbo, Marte Danielsen: "Between Subject and Object" in *Shared Territory*, Another Space, 2015, p. 20

For some time now I've been working on the relationships between objects. I'm interested in the transitions of hierarchies, of what supports and what is being displayed, and I try to make visible the system that exists beneath every elevated object. I want to remind the viewer that the object that you see standing seemingly alone, never exists independently but is part of a larger context. It's about how things actually come into existence, about the fact that things cannot exist in isolation from the things that they are built on. And so, the objects I work with become an image of what is needed in order for anything to get any attention at all. What happens when something is put into a golden frame, for example? It is given value precisely because the golden frame is an obvious signifier that something is worth being valued. In other words, it's something that's worth being framed in gold. →

Constantin Brancusi

Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957) was born in Romania. In 1904, he moved to Paris where he worked for the rest of his life. Brancusi has long been recognized as one of the pioneers of modern sculpture. His work marks a decisive break with the long tradition of sculpture in which the idealized human form was the primary bearer of meaning. Brancusi developed a vocabulary of geometric or quasi-geometric shapes to connote human and animal forms in ways that redefined the concept of sculptural representation.

Different aspects of Brancusi's achievement have inspired successive generations of artists. Brancusi was embraced by the 1960s Minimalist artists who recognized in his work a precedent for their systematic use of modular shapes and reduction of forms to essential geometric components.

His studio was of huge importance for Brancusi. Between 1916, when he took over his first unit at the Impasse Ronsin artist colony in Montparnasse, and the end of the 1940s, Brancusi managed to expand into a total of five units. He created his final work in 1949, and thereafter focused his attention on his studio as an artwork in itself. He was preoccupied with how his sculptures related both to the space they inhabited and to each other. If a work was sold, he replaced it with a plaster cast in order not to disrupt the unity he had established.

Brancusi bequeathed his studio and its contents to the French state on condition that it was preserved exactly as it was – as a museum object in its own right. Nevertheless, the entire Impasse Ronsin studio complex was demolished. In a project headed by the architect Renzo Piano, the studio has now been reconstructed in its entirety and occupies a dedicated building set into the plaza in front of Centre Pompidou. The sculptures are positioned between sketches and tools, as if Brancusi has taken a short break from his work. ●

Sources: The Museum of Modern Art, *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi* press release,1989 (downloaded from MoMA's website)

"Brancusi's Studio" on Centre Pompidou's website

Mugaas points to the design of bookrests and other display structures, and wants us to become more aware of their specific histories and contexts:

> I've been collecting visual material relating to how museums and libraries display their old, fragile books. When I've travelled in recent years, I have studied the different cases and boxes people use for this purpose, in all sorts of strange places. The way books are mounted and displayed has a connection with pedestals in sculpture, and how one uses a pedestal to elevate other objects both in art exhibitions and in ethnographic and historical exhibitions – namely to secure something valuable, to lock something in place and to make sure that visitors view the object from the desired angle.

A powerful source of inspiration for Mugaas's efforts to direct our attention towards the pedestal and supporting structures is one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, the Modernist pioneer and sculptor Constantin Brancusi.

> I've had a relationship to Brancusi's sculptures since I was young. He was important in the discussion around the "autonomous art object" and what gives it prominence. His art does not stop with the objects he made, he put just as much work into the pedestals themselves. They could just as well have been exhibited on their own – as sculptures in their own right. **(pp. 117–119)**
>
> He created a stage for himself and treated his atelier like a landscape. **(p. 117)** The blocks of stone that would become sculptures were just as important as those that were in the process of becoming or had already become finished works. The plinths were just as important as the sculptures. →

Steel Furniture 1979 (cat.no.5)

Burton's effortlessly switches from one to the other. This neither demeans the Kelly nor elevates the Burton; rather it underlines the conceptual irony that Burton has incorporated into his work. The settee is constructed from six interlocking elements cut from granite and its ancestors are the designs and forms of Bauhaus and de Stijl architecture. Abstraction is incorporated and investigated within the sub-language of functionalism; at one level what you need to appreciate it is what a critic of Burton's described as an 'educated behind'.

The education implicit in the backside of the audience is an understanding of the context and the purpose of the object. Burton relishes, even jealously guards, his position as an 'artist' which places him aside from designers. He recognises there are economic advantages; art is more highly valued than design, it is easier to make and sell highly polished individual 'prototypes'. It does not satisfy one of Burton's intentions, however, which is to extend the audience for his work. It is why he delights that the Dallas visitors use his settee without realising. The ambition is similar to those of the utopian modernists of the first three decades of this century and for Burton and his contemporaries they reach their climax in publicly acknowledged performance. He quotes Siah Armajani's installations, Laurie Anderson's 'USA' and Isamu Noguchi's gardens as varied examples of the search for this audience. Laurie Anderson perhaps came closest when 'O Superman' was number 2 in the charts and she could command a world-wide audience of millions. Burton's work with architects and planners is one direction on the route to a truly public art. Another is to make pieces produced in thousands as

Settee 1983 (cat.no.7)

Scott Burton

Scott Burton (1939–1989) worked for many years as an art critic, including a period as editor of *Artnews*, before making a name for himself as a performance artist in the late 1960s. From the first half of the 1970s, he also made furniture, which he introduced into his performances, and in 1975 he exhibited for the first time a "pure" sculpture – *Bronze Chair*. At the same time, Burton started to turn his attention to the public realm.

From 1979, 10 years before his death, he defined his works as functional furniture-as-sculpture and what he called "pragmatic sculpture". His sculptures were in a minimalist style, but Burton was just as interested in the social and cultural contexts that the objects inhabited as in the objects themselves. They were intended to be anonymous, almost invisible, woven into the fabric of the everyday. The environments he created in several places in New York City consisted of chairs and tables that are simultaneously functional objects and sculptures.

This type of erasing of boundaries was Burton's primary concern. In particular he was interested in the hazy distinction between art object and design. For the Artist's Choice exhibition *Burton on Brancusi* (April 7 – July 4, 1989), Burton selected, as the title suggests, works from MoMA's collection that were exclusively by the sculptor Constantin Brancusi. The press release stated that "… Burton wants to demonstrate 'that Brancusi radically rejected the distinction between the sculptures and his other created objects,' such as seats, tables, bases, and architectural elements. Burton also draws attention to Brancusi's 'invention for our century of sculpture as place,' in the artist's studio, now recognized as an environmental work of art in its own right". The fact that Burton himself referred so clearly to Brancusi as an inspiration also changed the public understanding of Burton's own works.

Scott Burton died of complications from AIDS in 1989, a few months after the exhibition of Brancusi's works was shown at MoMA. ●

Sources: Gearty, Giuliana Vaccarino: "Profile on Scott Burton" on UChicago Arts' website

The Museum of Modern Art, *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi* press release, 1989 (downloaded from MoMA's website)

Who chooses? The Artist's Choice series at MoMA

MoMA held its first Artist's Choice exhibition in 1989, when the artist Scott Burton was invited to select, juxtapose and comment on works from the museum's collection.

Since this first exhibition, 15 contemporary artists have been invited to organize exhibitions drawn from MoMA's collection. Five Artist's Choice exhibitions were shown in the period 1989–1995, while the ten most recent exhibitions have taken place between 2004 and 2021.

There are always several ways to tell a story. By explicitly naming the person who has selected the works one sees in the exhibition, MoMA is telling us that absolutely all exhibitions are the result of a series of choices. Although museum curators are not always named, there is still someone who has selected what we get to see and the stories to which our attention is drawn. This also means that something has been *consciously omitted*, whether this applies to artists, artworks or possible interpretations. From this perspective, the central role given to the curator in recent decades also serves to clarify the many choices that have always been made at museums before anything at all is presented to the public. ●

Source: Museum of Modern Art, MoMA

In spring 1989, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York held an exhibition titled "Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi." **(pp. 118–119)** Scott Burton's exhibition about Brancusi was the first in a series of exhibitions in which artists were invited to select, juxtapose and comment on works from MoMA's collection. At the time, a MoMA curator said: "We have to recognize that a crucial part of the modern tradition is the creative response of artists to the works of their peers and predecessors."[1] Mugaas describes her relationship to both Burton and Brancusi:

1 Kirk Varnedoe, Chief curator of Painting and Sculpture. See Artist's Choice series, MoMA website.

I had seen Burton's sculptures in the early 1990s without being particularly aware that they were his. Some stood in spaces open to the public in New York City's business district. (p. 120) Later on, I found out that he had assembled the first "Artist's Choice" exhibition at MoMA, in the spring of 1989, which had consisted almost exclusively of Brancusi pedestals. That was the spring before Burton died, and just before I began my studies at the Cooper Union School of Art, in New York City. These Brancusi pedestals were something that we came back to continually during my first years as a student – and I think that must have been because my tutors had probably seen the exhibition and were intrigued about how Burton drew attention to this aspect of Brancusi's work.

A few years ago, I made a book support to hold the small pamphlet from that exhibition. (p. 124) Even though I only learned of it in hindsight, the Burton-Brancusi exhibition has been interesting to me, because it tells me something about my own position within a series of events, about what foundations I rest on; where I derive things from. →


BOKBINDERIET
Johnsen
BOKBINDERIET
Johnsen


ZDENKA RUSOVA
MARIANNE HESKE


Tone Vigeland

Mugaas's bookrests grew out of a larger project that the artist has been working on for several years, where she investigates how types of labor that have been associated with women traditionally, constitute supportive functions within our society. In her work, the artist has particularly focused on the acts of lifting and carrying (of children, food, water, etc.) linked to housework and the maintenance of everyday life. In 2019, she won the prestigious Lorck Schive Art Prize for her exhibition "Nødvendigheten av leddsetninger" ("The Necessity of Dependent Clauses"). **(pp. 138–140)** Translated literally from Norwegian, "leddsetninger" means "joint sentences." The word reflects how a joint ("ledd") links two components together. This differs from the English term "dependent clauses," which suggests something that is dependent, secondary, or subordinate. The exhibition consisted of sculptures made from old book boxes, films of a woman attempting to balance a box on her head, and a number of postcards of seats, sculptures, and architectonic elements. All the works in the exhibition thematized or drew attention to supporting structures of various types. →

The Necessity of Dependent Clauses

Eline Mugaas's project *The Necessity of Dependent Clauses* is an immersive art installation that has been exhibited on two occasions: in 2019 as part of the Lorck Schive Art Prize exhibition at Trondheim Art Museum and in 2020 at Galleri Riis in Oslo. The installation consists of a sculptural group, three videos and several photographic prints in various formats, ranging from small postcards to framed pictures and large images pasted directly onto the wall.

The sculptures were made from book boxes, which were stacked to create structures resembling shelving units. As part of the process of making the sculptures, the cardboard boxes were coated with papier-mâché, glue and cement. This stiffened and strengthened them, but also caused them to lose some of their original shape as they softened and sagged into one another. As part of the installation, postcards were propped on some of the sculptures, attributing to them an additional function as plinths. Videos were projected onto semi-transparent sheets →

of plastic, which were suspended using hand clamps from freestanding metal supports.

The videos showed the head and upper body of a person, seen from behind, attempting to balance an empty cardboard box on their head. The cardboard box is light, and on several occasions when it is about to fall, we see an arm come up into the frame to prop it up again. In one of the videos, the image is turned upside down, so that even in the video, the cardboard box becomes a plinth. This intervention emphasizes how the thing that is supported can also become the support.

The postcards and photographs show images of people in various poses, as well as supportive architectural elements that often go unnoticed in the public realm. Examples include the cushioned seats supporting figures in ancient Greek temple reliefs, the pedestals used to support sculptures, and benches in city streets. (pp. 130, 136–137) Through visual similarities in the images, Mugaas establishes connections between series of elements from cultural history. These connections are not necessarily historically correct, but they trigger associations and make links between the different images. For example, Mugaas finds a resemblance between caryatids from ancient Greece and a film by the modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi of a woman dancing on a plinth. Caryatids are load-bearing pillars sculpted in the forms of female figures, who support the architecture of temples and mausoleums with their arms or on their heads. The women stand in contrapposto poses, resting their weight on one leg, and are clothed in elaborately carved draperies. Caryatids are interpreted as representing the women who bore offerings to the gods in baskets on their heads, or priestesses who danced for a goddess while balancing baskets filled with different fruits and plants on their heads, so that they appeared almost to be dancing trees. Brancusi was also extremely interested in dance and often activated his sculptures and pedestals by using dancers.

In Mugaas's installation, all the works are dependent clauses: they are bound together in a circular progression that is repeated throughout cultural history with its masculine gaze on women who bear the roofs of temples and cheese wheel boxes on their heads, who stoop to gather children into their arms, lending support, and dancing. ●

Sources: "Lorck Schive Kunstpris 2019", Trondheim Art Museum's website

Galleri Riis

Aamas, Ragnhild: "Kvinnen som ble en hylle" ["The Woman Who Became a Shelf" – in Norwegian only], Kunstkritikk, 27.02.2020

"Caryatids", worldhistory.org

Could you say a little about your thoughts on something being necessary, and on the supporting structures that you call attention to in your work?

> Necessity has to do with meaning. I've always defined myself on the basis of what I've made, right since I was a child. The title "The Necessity of Dependent Clauses" came about because I'm interested in the precise idea that one builds something complex out of something that in itself cannot stand alone. The words "joint clauses" gave me a concrete image of the joints of the human body – like an elbow, an arm that is carrying something, a dancer's arm being raised. This flexibility allows more rigid structures to be bound together, it makes a flatter hierarchy. Necessity says something about how something is precarious.

Over the last decade, Mugaas has also worked purposefully to draw public attention to the artistic career of an older female colleague – Siri Aurdal. Her efforts resulted, among other things, in a two-person exhibition and a publication, and led to her continuing interest in support structures – in things which in one context make something else possible and visible, but are seldom visible themselves.

> Working with Aurdal I have investigated what it means as an artist to use my time, my gaze, my energy, and my networks to call attention to someone else's work. It has given me an inside experience of being a support structure, something that is expected to be invisible. And the fact that I didn't make myself invisible was perceived by some as contaminating the interpretation of Aurdal's artistic practice. As an artist I took on a role that did not fit with a non-contextual approach to art history and canon. →

Siri Aurdal

The Norwegian sculptor Siri Aurdal (born 1937) was very active in the 1960s and 70s, when she became well known for her monumental and experimental sculptures in innovative materials. Among other things, she exhibited large interactive sculptures in a solo exhibition at Kunstnernes Hus in Oslo in 1969. Visitors were encouraged to draw and climb on the sculptures, which were made from fiberglass-reinforced polyester tubing, an innovative material developed for the oil industry. In 1972, she used the same material to create a sculpture for Trosterud School in Oslo.(p. 144) This functional playground sculpture could accommodate 100 children at once. In 1979, Aurdal participated in the Antwerp Biennale with a 34-meter-long sculpture in which she further developed her characteristic hollow, wave-like formations. Aurdal was also a member of the influential GRAS artists' collective.

After the Antwerp Biennale, there are few mentions of Siri Aurdal. Her name appears in a few overviews of the members of GRAS, but her public artworks were made in materials that often did not withstand the test of time. Rather than being conserved, they were removed.

While conducting research for the exhibition *Hold stenhårdt fast på greia di – Norwegian Art and Feminism 1968–1989* (Kunsthall Stavanger who showed the exhibition in 2014 write on their website: "The title of the exhibition, Hold stenhårdt fast på greia di, is the title of a drawing by Sidsel Paasche from 1973. It defies an easy English translation, so we have not attempted to offer one. A naive reading would be 'Hold on to your thing', but it contains more innuendo (employed by Paaske with gender roles reversed), more poetry, and a specific collision of formality and Oslo slang."), which Eline Mugaas organized in collaboration with Elise Storsveen and Kunsthall Oslo in 2013, Mugaas came across a photograph of Aurdal's installations in the main gallery at the Kunstnernes Hus art center in Oslo. She thought it strange that she knew nothing about these large works. Aurdal was included in the 2013 exhibition, and Mugaas continued to assist Aurdal by collaborating on a thorough review of her archive – a project that extended over several years and that led to much exhibition activity and the production of new versions of the large tube-based sculptures. In 2016, the exhibition Aurdal/Mugaas was shown in the same galleries at Kunstnernes Hus as those where Aurdal had exhibited in 1969, and in 2018 the two artists held a joint exhibition at Skissernas Museum in Lund, Sweden.(p. 145) The book *Siri Aurdal by Eline Mugaas* was published by the American publisher Primary Information.

Aurdal represented Norway in the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2017, and the following year she had a major solo exhibition at Malmø Kunsthall. She has also participated in several group exhibitions, including at the Murray Guy gallery in New York City in 2016. When the new National Museum opens in Oslo in 2022, it will include a permanent installation by Aurdal, who continues to live and work in Oslo. ●

Sources: Kunstnernes Hus' website on the exhibition Aurdal/Mugaas

Elton, Lars: "Helt kanon!" [Absolutely Canon! – Norwegian only], Dagsavisen, 04.03.2016

Canon

A canon is a collection of texts, rules, or, in this case, artworks, that are commonly accepted as complete, adequate and representative – or the most significant works from a particular period. Works of art included are considered to be masterpieces, a standard by which other pieces can be judged. There is an underlying assumption that only a small number of works can be included within a canon or 'canonized'. Art history as a discipline and its way of thinking and representing the art of the past was developed in the 19th century and became consolidated as an academic subject and a museum practice in the 20th century.

Power and privilege, indifference and exclusion are actively produced and secured by official repetition of selective "stories". In other words, the art historical canon is a product of ideological conditioning. ●

Sources: "What is the Meaning of the Canon When Applied to Art?" on artmumble.com

"Kanon" in the *Great Norwegian Encyclopedia* – Norwegian only (snl.no)

Parker, Rozika & Griselda Pollock – *Old Mistresses. Women, Art and Ideology*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, first published 1981 by Pandora Press, reprinted in 2021

What or whom is it that's doing the lifting, and who is being lifted? And when does something become invisible, or become superfluous? It has been essential for me to continue to work on this theme. Is there any way to bestow equal status on what is on display and the display mechanism, namely the person or the object that is holding it up? I see it as an impossible task, for as soon as you put something on a pedestal, for example, the pedestal subsides. A support apparatus is by its very nature not intended to be seen, to draw attention to itself. But is something unnecessary just because you don't see it? It turns out at closer inspection that you can't remove the support.

This point about invisibility also has much larger implications. These are linked to the struggle for women's rights, the struggle against the continual concealment of the structures and networks that are at play. Like the idea that when you succeed as an artist, what you have accomplished you have done all on your own. This is an illusion, of course. In addition, it conceals those factors that have enabled male artists to make their breakthroughs, and which have made it difficult for many female artists to do the same, because they have often stood outside the system – outside the network.

By directing your gaze at something, you give it visibility and value, and as an artist that is one of the tools you work with. When you move your gaze from your own work to that of another artist, it becomes obvious what weight this gaze has. There is a line in this social game between being self-confident – having faith in your own project – and appearing to be crassly self-promoting. And my experience is that this line is drawn much sooner for women than it is for men.

Another foundation for the bookrest sculptures is Mugaas's long history of working with books.

I've been making books for a while. Books that are artworks in their own right, books about my work, and a book about another artist. With that book I became someone who was carrying someone else. All of this went into the bookrests, but there is also a practical part in that I want to see a book as an art object in itself. The Aurdal book, for example, was wrongly received as a catalogue, which made me interested in drawing attention to it as an art object and including it in shows in various ways. First, I took four or five copies and allowed them to lie open at different pages. Subsequently, I made a project based on the cardboard

> boxes in which the books about Aurdal arrived from the printer's, and which were lying around in my studio – they became the sculptures in "The Necessity of Dependent Clauses."

Mugaas, who lives with dyslexia, finds other ways of communicating than through text. Factors such as a book's size and weight can communicate just as powerfully as words that something is important; that a story is worth pursuing further.

> I studied sculpture at art school and one thing that I've taken from that which is important to me, including when I make books, is the relationship between size and shape. What is an object's inherent scale? How does scale change an object's presence in the world? When is something experienced as large or small in relation to one's own body?

The artist points to a conservatism on the part of art historians, who continually revert to written sources to find the "truth" about artworks and artists, but who often forget to acknowledge that much art was never documented in writing. The experience of art is first and foremost a physical encounter, a "here and now" before the work gets written about.

> One should never underestimate the physical experience: when you touch something, your fingers acquire knowledge about what you're touching just as much as your head does. We have a mass of shared and personal experiences, and those memories sit in our bodies. When we experience art, we have these memories with us, and we read both objects and materials in their light. For instance, what does a high-quality offset print on thick paper communicate compared to an image on newsprint? What is the difference between an object in terrazzo and one made from a cheap mass-produced

building material, even if some people would refer to both as “concrete”?

As an artist, your work is to create meaning. Everyone does this of course, but artists are trained to be hyper-aware of it. Art is important because it strives to articulate something about being alive right now, and it can do this by activating things we take for granted: creating mental speed bumps that make viewers aware of something they might walk past otherwise. This can be done in big or small ways, aesthetically, politically, or existentially, but it’s about experiences. For me, the delight of art is to recognize shared experiences – sometimes really small and specific ones, and sometimes over vast expanses of time. All these human experiences that one can be in contact with are part of the language of art. •

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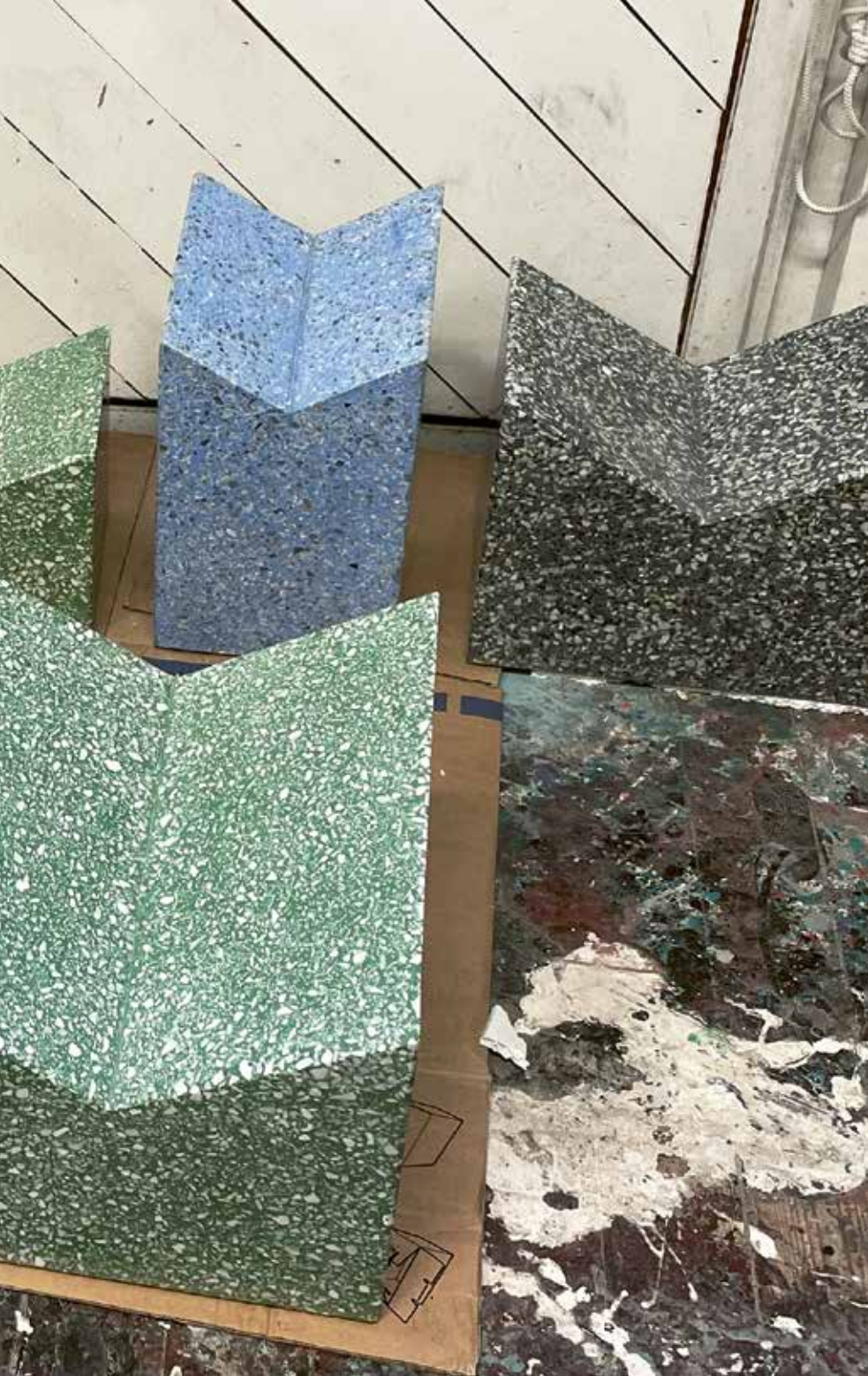

The chancery at the Norwegian embassy in Washington, D.C. houses works by artists Elisabeth Haarr, Eline Mugaas and Ann Cathrin November Høibo. Together these artworks shed new light and perspectives on Norwegian technology, innovation, and cultural history.

Weaved with wool from the traditional sheep breed *spælsau*, Ann Cathrin November Høibo's large-scale tapestry *Dreams Ahead* greets visitors and staff upon entering the embassy's foyer. Elisabeth Haarr's two textile works *Færdaminne – OH Gunta!* and *Færdaminne – Jammerbugt* are inspired by the *rya boat rug* and the advanced craftmanship and survival function for sailors these represented. Accompanying Haarr's works in the Ambassador's lounge, Eline Mugaas's sculpture group *Rocks in Tidal Water* doubles as bookrests and are part of her continuous investigation into often unnoticed support structures in society, of which we all depend.

KORO