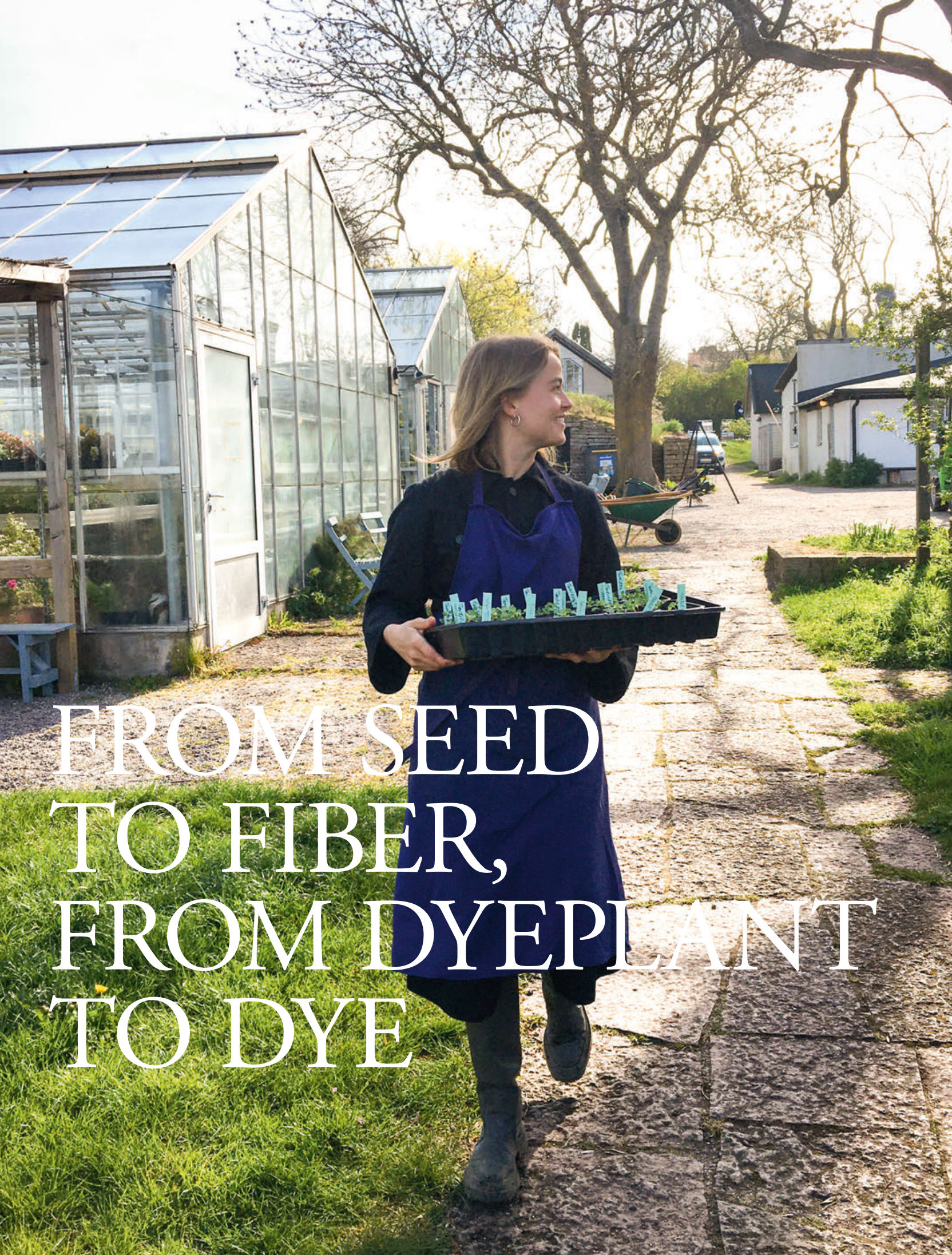
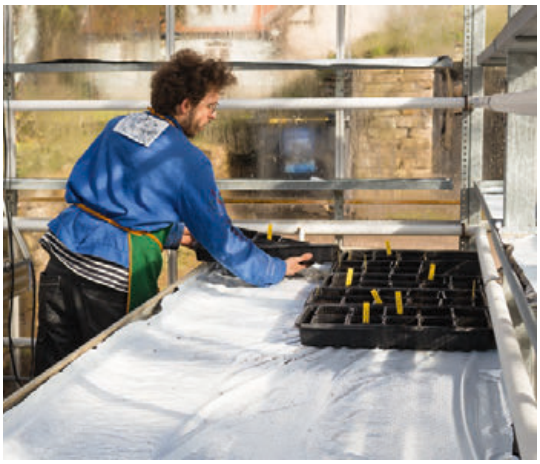


FROM SEED TO FIBER, FROM DYEPLANT TO DYE

Linda Zetterman and Berit Grybäck, teachers at Capellagården on Öland. Fanny Stengårds, page 22 and Gösta Östergren, below, prepare for growing dye-plants.

IT'S THURSDAY THE 23RD OF MARCH, TIME TO PLANT THIS YEAR'S DYEPLANTS. WE'RE AT CAPELLAGÅRDEN TO MEET LINDA ZETTERMAN AND BERIT GRYBÄCK. WE GET TO JOIN THE SOWING AND SEE THE GARDEN WHERE DYEPLANTS WILL GROW LATER THIS SUMMER. BUT FIRST, A BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION IN THE WEAVING HALL WHERE ONE OF THE TEXTILE STUDENTS IS FÊTED WITH A CAKE.

After lunch, everyone gathers to help get the seeds in the ground. In order to retain moisture in the earth, we mix in a bit of perlite. When we're finished, the pots are placed in a heated greenhouse. Here they'll sit and grow, to be moved later to a cold greenhouse–when the weather allows–and then out into the garden. The dyeplants are an important part of the creative process here. In addition to the cultivated plants, there are plenty of wild plants, berries, and nuts surrounding Capellagården. They belong to the color palette of the place.



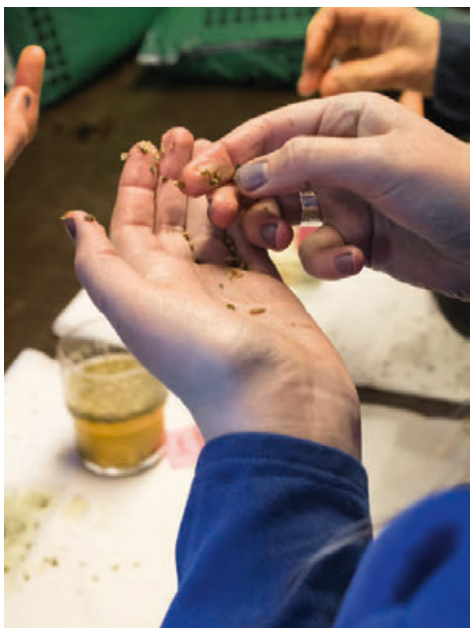
Berit Grybäck is the weaving and materials teacher here. Linda Zetterman teaches design, textile printing, and dyeing. They've both worked at the school for a long time, Berit started in 2005 and Linda in 2013. In addition to their pedagogical engagement in the school, they also work with textiles professionally. For Linda, dyeplants are an important starting point, and Berit points to linen as a material with many uses.

In her professional life, Berit makes "bruks-textilier", useful textiles. She encourages using the woven goods that come from her hands, in the loom, a way of giving them life and patina. She comes from a textile-making family where craft is close to the heart and handwoven textiles have always been part of daily life. Linen has always been present.

– That's something I want to bring to my teaching. Showing linen's potential in many different contexts. Daring to use it. That's when it is at its most beautiful and functional.

Everyone in the Textile course can join the process, from sowing to spinning. The cycle looks like this: At the end of a school year, the flax is sown. The fall term begins in a hurry, the flax is harvested and laid out for retting. Last year's flax is processed and spun. During the Harvest Festival at the end of September, which is celebrated across Öland, the flax is rippled (the seeds are removed), laid out for retting, and the seeds are threshed out.

Linda Zetterman studied design at Konstfack in Stockholm from 1998–2003, and later worked in the fashion industry. She has traveled extensively in Vietnam, India, and Japan, and there she saw that there are different ways

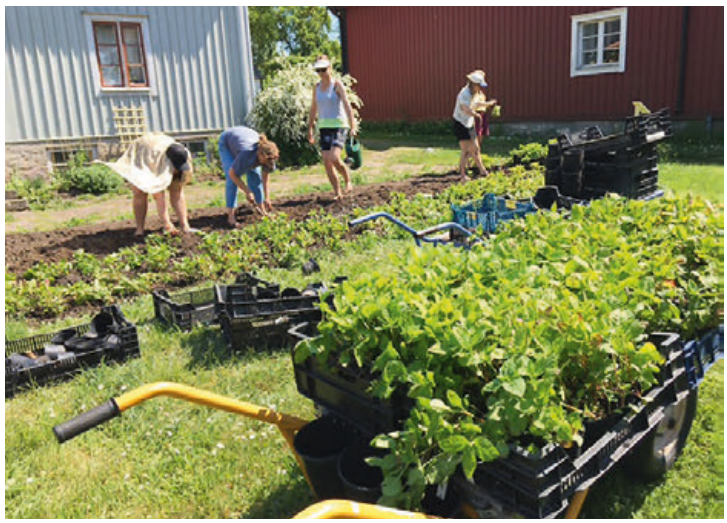


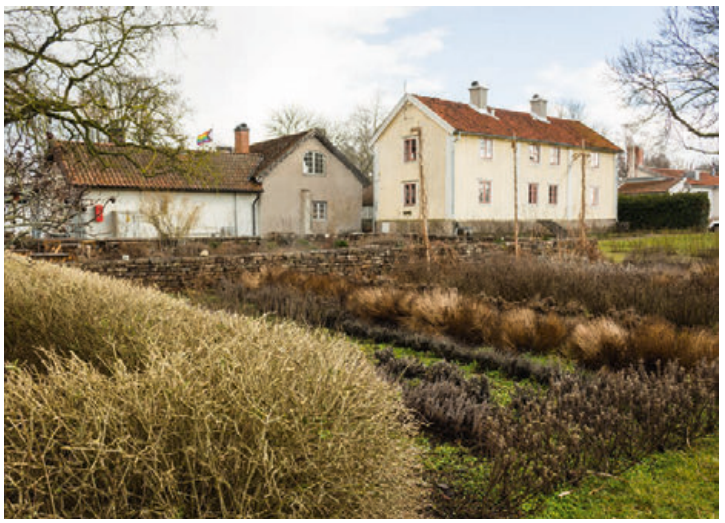
of working, alternatives to large-scale mass production. These countries had systems of small-scale production for daily use.

– That got me off the mass-production train. I wanted something different. Before I got to Konstfack I had studied at Capellagården and learned to weave. Now I'm back. This place offered me the opportunity to put into practice a more sustainable way of relating both to textile material and how it is dyed.

Dyeing with plants began on a small scale at the school, with what was in the garden: mignonette, a bit of woad. And everything growing naturally around Capellagården: chestnut, oak, walnut, which all contain a wealth of tannins, a substance that helps pigment integrate with the textile material. The school has the luxury of a master gardener and a gardening course, whose students and expertise are an important resource.

There is also a greenhouse available for use. During the pandemic year of 2020, the Textile Course was awarded financial support





from The National Craft Council (NFH) to expand the garden. Linda's network was a big help. She also spent a lot of time on the internet, searching for seeds and knowledge. The dyeplant beds now house marigolds (orange and yellow hues), madder (the roots of which need time to mature, red hues), yellow chamomile (yellow hues), cosmos (yellow and orange hues), woad and indigo/japanese indigo (blue and blue-green hues), hollyhocks (the red flowers make a purple-blue hue), and lady's mantle (fine yellow hues). They've tried safflower (yellow and red hues), but the pH of the earth is too alkaline here.

The dyeplants are used both for dyeing and eco-printing, where the dyeplants' pigment is applied to yarn or fabric by pressing fresh plant matter into the material. The seeds of many of the dyeplants can be collected for the next season, and they sell some seeds as well. Each year they introduce a new species; this year they'll test a Mexican marigold, which should make black when iron is added.

The anticipation is clear in Linda's tone.

– Mapping a place through color is interesting, and here at Capellagården, we have a treasure trove of color. Harvesting can begin during the summer months. Participants in the summer courses get to dye with fresh indigo leaves. The dyeplants growing now make up a majority of the dyes that will be used in the creative process the coming fall. Both the cultivated plants and the natural, wild growth around Capellagården form the unique color palette of the place; 240 shades have been documented.

The sample card presents each color with six different additions of an alkaline (slaked lime), or acid (vinegar). Alun is also used often, and at a much lower concentration than can be found in earlier formulas.

– We work as naturally as possible. In addition to the slaked lime, vinegar, and alun, the tannins that can be found growing in our backyard are an important foundation. The dyeplants are a part of the process from the start. The first design exercise, hand towels, include both hand-spinning flax and dyeing. The synthetic dyeing we previously taught has mostly been replaced by natural dyeing, but we do still teach dyeing and printing with synthetic dyes sometimes.

– It's about learning about color, and the skills you learn through any kind of dyeing can be applied to all types of dyeing techniques, says Linda.

HOLISTIC VISION AND SUSTAINABILITY

How would you describe how you strive for sustainability?

Linda: So much of it is about scale. All excess production is called into question, and we focus on making only what we need, on a more tangible scale and that the processes we use cause as little harm as possible.

Berit: If you've handled a material throughout the whole process, such as with flax, you gain an understanding and a respect for textiles. That's what we teach here. Insight into the

specific characteristics of each material, such as the different specific attributes linen has depending on where it was grown, how it was grown, how it was retted, should be seen as an asset and not a problem. Flax and linen as materials have so many dimensions. In order to gain a better understanding, I usually compare the process of extracting a fiber to chewing on a piece of grass, and it always works. There is always someone who compares it to other plants, for example nettles. Can you make a fiber out of it? Can it be dyed with?

Even the other courses at Capellagården have been inspired by the flax. The new historic preservation course uses the bits left over after threshing for their wattle and daubing of walls. The flax makes for a stronger reinforcement than other materials. One student in the ceramics course searched for stalks to brush glaze with, inspired by a Japanese method. A brush made with unretted thin flax stalks was a success.

Here we emphasize artistic freedom and that each person can find their own way– "efter vars och ens näbb och fason" (approximately: to each their own), to cite our founder Carl Malmsten.

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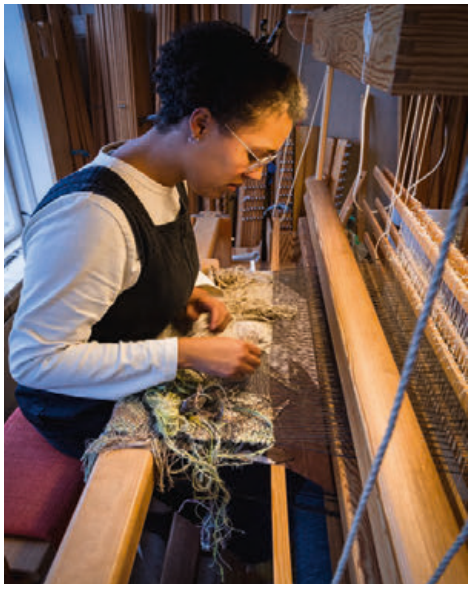

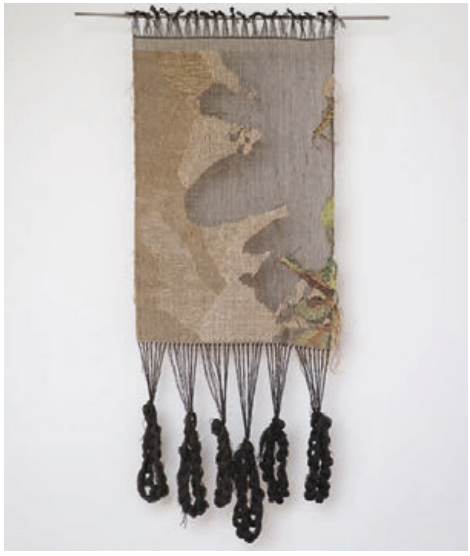

SOPHIE OLSSON JOOF is in her second year at the school. On the loom is a linen warp dyed with acorns and iron vitriol (iron scraps), a dark blue-black. Sophie is weaving with yarns donated to the school by Elisabet Hasselberg Olsson.

The working title is Rhyme *(picture in the middle). I see the creative process as something poetic and I'll give the piece a longer name with a reference to poetry when it's finished. Most of my work is about examining or visiting with my and my family's heritage, a lot about identity and kind of putting together the puzzle of understanding my history. Most of my reference material comes from video and photographs I collected when I was in Gambia.*

This work depicts a plant that is called poftan in Wolof, which grows all over Gambia, including in my aunt's courtyard. It's become symbolic for me, such a clear visual reference when I think of my aunts and everything else in Gambia, but also because poftan is such a central part of many people's daily lives, in a way. Used as a medicinal plant, it's said the seeds can blind a person and the extract from the leaves can be used as glue.

My cousin's wife uses it to repair ripped bills, so it also has a sort of symbolism as a currency, or a status-enhancer. Much of what I've just described overlaps with my own divided relationship to the country: belonging there, but so clearly sticking out–having a European passport, the privileges that come with that.

My decision to weave so that the warp is most visible and plays such a large role in this piece is a reference to the term "shadow work", described by Google as "working with your unconscious mind to uncover the parts of yourself that you repress and hide from yourself. " Materiality is very important in my work: when I weave, I get so much for free, compared to when I paint.

Different textures, the tactile component, where the material comes from. It all contributes to the stories I'm trying to tell, one weft pick at a time. By working with natural dyes, I can charge the material with extra meaning. I'm completely convinced that thoughts and feelings are woven into work that is so very tactile and when I use clay from Gambia, or acorns from Öland, I weave in life from both places, and from myself. It's a philosophical thought that can be contemplated endlessly, sometimes it's hard to say where the boundary between yourself and a place ends or begins.