



FÅGELSJÖ

A MÄRTA MÅÅS-FJETTERSTRÖM WEAVE, CONSIDERED QUITE UNIQUE.

Fågelsjö chapel, situated where Hälsingland, Dalarna and Härjedalen meet, is home to a tapestry weave with the same name as the chapel, *Fågelsjö*. Its placement, dating back to 1933 when the church was renovated, is above the altar between two pilasters. The motif of the work is based on three rows of lilies, so heavily stylized that they make cross forms. The ground behind has been divided into horizontal sections, where the colour changes employed create rhythm and variation in the tapestry. Above the lilies are stars against a light night sky, the blues of which form striped fields. The initials in the signature at the very bottom corner are MMF, denoting Märta Måås-Fjetterström, one of the most important textile artists of the 20th century.

Märta Måås-Fjetterström lived from 1873 to 1941. In 1919 she established her textile workshop in Båstad, which bears her name and is still going today. Märta Måås-Fjetterström is probably most closely associated with rugs. These can be found in private homes, embassies, public institutions and on sanctuary floors in many Swedish churches. Märta Måås-Fjetterström's father was the pastor in Vadstena Abbey church and she grew up in this church environment. Later in life, Märta Måås-Fjetterström donated a rug she designed to the Abbey church, inscribed with the words of Psalm 119 (in Swedish), "Your word is a lamp for my feet". Apart from rugs for church

use, she also designed other kinds of ecclesiastical textiles, including antependiums to cover the fronts of altars, smaller cloths for the lectern and larger such as funeral pall.

The weaving in Fågelsjö chapel is undoubtedly by Märta Måås-Fjetterström. But how did this weaving find its way to the chapel? Various ideas and conjectures about the matter have often been raised in the parish, as any knowledge of its origin has been lost. I have visited Fågelsjö chapel and was able to have a conversation about the weaving with Margareta Halvarsson, one of the chapel wardens. About how it came to be there. That was when it occurred to us that Hedvig Ulfsparré might have a connection with the creation of the work. It was a lead to follow up.

Hedvig Ulfsparré was born in 1877 in Skåne but came to live her adult life in Gästrikland, at Hofors manor and Kungsgården. She became a collector of textiles and left one of the largest private Swedish textile collections of its time which can be viewed today at Gävleborg County Museum. The collection includes some fifty works by Märta Måås-Fjetterström herself.¹ The best known of Märta Måås-Fjetterström's works in this collection is the *Unicorn in the Forest weaving*, though the collection is broad in scope, ranging from tablecloths to rugs. The County Museum also holds Hedvig Ulfsparré's archive. Which is in

fact where the answer to the question about Fågelsjö lies. Hedvig Ulfsparré writes about the *Fågelsjö* weaving in a letter dated 1941 to curator Erik Wettergren with reference to an upcoming exhibition at Nationalmuseum in Stockholm: Märta Måås-Fjetterström had become acquainted with a young priest, pastor Norlander/ ... / from Los and Hamra. Pastor N was so interested in her art work that he raised the funds through the sewing association etc and requested that he might commission an "altar panel" from her for one of the chapels in the Finnmark wilds of northern Hälsingland. I recall that it was for Fogelsjö."² Los parish had two pastors named Olof Norlander, father and son. It was the latter that commissioned the Fågelsjö weaving.

Pastor Norlander met Märta Måås-Fjetterström in person and would in all likelihood have seen her textile art at Hedvig Ulfsparré's. Precisely when they met does not get mentioned in Hedvig Ulfsparré's correspondence but it is conceivable that it happened in connection with a commission for the County Governor's wife, Maja Lübeck. Her friends presented her on the occasion of her 50th birthday in 1930 with a rug specially composed by Märta Måås-Fjetterström. The motif was inspired by the regional landscape.³ How then did the pastor and Hedvig Ulfsparré know each other? Presumably from the period when Olof Norlander was the incumbent

The weaving in Fågelsjö chapel.
Photo: Peter Hoelstad

¹ Bergman, Ingrid, Hedvig Ulfsparré. Skaparen av Sveriges största privata textilsamling. Hedvig Ulfsparré och Gästriklands textila slöjd. (Creator of Sweden's largest private textile collection. Hedvig Ulfsparré and the textile craft traditions of Gästrikland.) Stockholm 1984, page 14.

² Länsmuseum Gävleborg (County Museum). Hedvig Ulfsparré's archive, F5:1. Letter to Curator Erik Wettergren,

Nationalmuseum, dated 20.6 1941. Applies to all the quotes given when nothing else is stated.

³ Article "Gift to the County Governor's wife Maja Lübeck", Svenska Dagbladet 16 September 1930.

Märta Måås-Fjetterström amidst lilies.
Photo: property of MMF AB.



curate in Hofors. In 1922 he married Märta Elisabeth Wiklund, who was born in Hofors but died at the age of 30 in 1926, it is therefore unlikely that she was present when Olof Norlander met Märta Måås-Fjetterström, but may have been the one who acquainted him with Hedvig Ulfsparré.¹

Further on in the letter to curator Wettergren we learn more of how the commission came about: "The pastor had, according to Märtha, many original ideas on the matter and Märtha undertook the altar panel with active interest." This shows that Olof Norlander was closely involved in the way the weaving evolved. Just what his "original ideas" consisted of is not apparent but we might imagine that these could be to do with the special placement of the weaving between the pilasters on the wall behind the altar. Perhaps he also had some ideas and wishes concerning the visual content even if this is a signature Märta Måås-Fjetterström work. Several motifs appear to have been possible and under consideration for the weaving. Hedvig

Ulfsparré notes "lilies, thorns, stars, a dove etc. to be part of it" but all of these did not go into the final weaving. From Märta Måås-Fjetterström's watercolour sketches it would appear that at the sketching stage there was even a large central cross in the weaving.² This disappeared and the lilies spread themselves out over the woven face instead.

Lilies and stars are to be found in several other Märta Måås-Fjetterström textiles. A year or so before the Fågelsjö weaving came into existence, she designed an antependium for Båstad church incorporating lilies and the lamb of God. Lilies also cover the whole face of a weave she designed in 1933, owned by HM the King. It is redolent of a photograph where she herself is standing amidst a sea of lilies, as upright as those on the three textiles. The very last rug she did also has lilies, bearing a close resemblance to the fleur-de-lis.

Stars twinkle in various forms in Märta Måås-Fjetterström's sketches and weaves. Of them she writes: "Stars, especially the

Sketch for the *Fågelsjö* weave.

Photo: property of MMF AB. Photographer Anette Nilsson, MMF AB.

eight-pointed star /.../ crop up in every age and in the textile art of every country".³ For Märta Måås-Fjetterström, nature was an important source of inspiration within which she saw, as with the stars, a time perspective overarching her own creativity: "nature, the never-ending wellspring for every form, from which every age has drawn".⁴

Whether Hedvig Ulfsparré ever got to see the Fågelsjö weaving is uncertain. In 1941 she had as yet not seen it and writes "although I was instrumental in sending the sketch back and forth, I have not seen the finished panel". In 1945 she again writes that she has not managed to see the weaving and we also learn that Märta Måås-Fjetterström made the very first sketch when with her at Kungsgården.⁵

From Hedvig Ulfsparré's correspondence it also transpires that she had requested the loan of the Fågelsjö weaving on several occasions for exhibiting. Each time a request was made, the parish declined it. She presumably did not know how the work was displayed in the church, that it constituted part of the altarpiece against the wall and was set in between two pilasters, which was why it could not easily be loaned out.

Hedvig Ulfsparré recounts in her letter of 1941 that the parish "was happy with their treasure". She also expresses something many others feel about the Fågelsjö weaving – "it is quite unique". Today we can ascertain that as an altar weaving it is more than rather unique, it is one of a kind. It appears to be the only altar weaving that Märta Måås-Fjetterström composed.⁶ Most of her ecclesiastical textiles are to be found in the southern and central Swedish dioceses.⁷ There are fewer further north, but still extant as the pearls they are.

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¹ Thanks to Anna Forsberg, former archivist at Gävleborg County Museum, for all the help with personal research and guidance through the Hedvig Ulfsparré archive.

² The sketches are held at Märta Måås-Fjetterström AB, Båstad.

³ Bergman, Ingrid, Märta Måås-Fjetterström. (Master and innovator in textile art.) En mästare och nyskapare inom textilkonsten. Stockholm 1990, page 27.

⁴ Ibid page 27.

⁵ Gävleborg County Museum. Hedvig Ulfsparré archive, F5:1. List of Weavings by Märtha Måås-Fjetterström in the Hedvig Ulfsparré collection, Kungsgården. Dated 4 February 1945.

⁶ Reported by Angelica Persson, Märta Måås-Fjetterström AB.

⁷ Markus Dahlberg, "Märta Måås and church textile treasures", in RIG cultural historical journal, 1/2020, page 33, in Swedish.

1.86 x 1.21



Skala,
1:5.

Förslag till
Vävnad
för
Altaret i
Fågelsjö
Kapell.

Måste näs-
Färdstäm-
Bastad

Nº 91 Fågelsjö kapell.