



FOCUS ON TEXTILE ART

MAKE IT GROW—TEXTILE EXPRESSIONS AS PUBLIC ART OFFERS AN IMPRESSIVE COLLECTION OF TEXTILE WORKS PURCHASED AND COMMISSIONED BY THE SWEDISH PUBLIC ART AGENCY FROM THE 1970S ONWARD.

All of the works in the exhibition are intended for public spaces and specific places, sometimes easily accessible for the public but often placed in spaces that aren't available to all, such as court buildings, universities, and government agencies. This makes it even more of a treat to be able to see these textile treasures. The word substantial comes to mind: these are well-made and finished works, sustainable in every sense of the word. This doesn't exclude performance and digital works.

The idea for this exhibition, with its focus on textile art, came about because Handarbetets Vänner (The Friends of Handicraft) celebrates 150 years this year. A significant portion of the textile art we see in public spaces have passed through and were produced in the Atelier at Handarbetets Vänner. The collaboration with the Public Art Agency began with the agency's founding in 1937.

The exhibition consists of a wide range of textile works from the 1970s and onward. Thirty-eight artists are represented, showing more than forty artworks. The 1970s were an exciting time for textile art, pushing its status as an artform forward into the contemporary art scene. Textile art fit right into this poli-



ticized and expressive time with its flood of art and images. Partially due to the practical: large formats, messaging, and banners work well in textiles, especially techniques such as screen-print and application embroidery. Textile skills and the soft materiality also fit in with new societal values and norms. It can be said that the status of textiles as an art form was reclaimed in the 1970s, which manifested in, among other things, that textile artists were accepted into KRO, the Artists' Association of Sweden, and consequently had access to a broader network. On the traditional hierarchical scale, art has always been held higher than contemporary art craft—a discussion

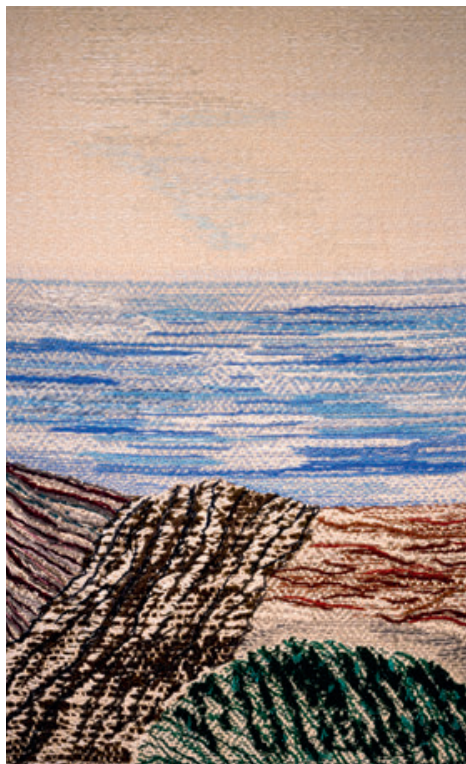
we can hope is near extinction. At the same time, it's important to remember that textile art has historically had a prominent role in decorating rooms in all kinds of spaces, from nomads' tents to palaces.

The title of the exhibition comes from the title of one of the works in the exhibition, *Det skall växa—sammetsdjungel* (Make it Grow – Velvet jungle), from 1974. Velvet is an emblematic fabric of the time, and the velvet truly comes into its own with the deep colors of the vines—or maybe the opposite: the colors deepen thanks to the material quality of the velvet. The piece was, of course, groundbreaking:

a soft, playful, and humoristic artwork in a monumental format opened up a new understanding of how textile can be used in public spaces. Agneta Flock and her colleagues made a total of twelve parts of the velvet jungle, and they were shown all over the world. The velvet jungle turns fifty this year: still fresh, refreshing, and spectacular.

Sandra Ikse is represented with her work from 1984, *Tillit i ditt kaos* (Trust In Your Chaos). This work is broken up in mixed media: quilting, screen-printing, and tapestry weaving. Sandra Ikse worked in a more political/feminist direction, indicated clearly in both the

pp.10–11: **Agneta Flock** *Det skall växa – sammetsdjungel* (Make it Grow–Velvet jungle), 1974
Anita Graffmans *Det kommer en vår*, (A Spring is Coming)
 Monumental weaving in three parts, 1985



title of the piece and its implementation. It consists of quilted sections (or maybe stuffed) in organic forms, pieced together with perfectly sharp overlock seams. A portrait in tapestry is sewn on top of the lower section of the quilting. It is pieced-together and hung on a visible iron rod. There's a directness in this work, an impatience with conventional thinking. It communicates strength and confidence.

Another work that reflects real life is Esse McChesney's work from 2020, *Mastektomi* (Mastectomy). It is a small image on apricot-colored velour with a torso embroidered in blue. The stitches are used to emphasize the anatomy—a muscular body—including scarring from a gender-affirming surgery. The careful execution makes the viewer aware of what is at stake in this process. It's brilliant and moving, and demands that you stop and take in what the seemingly unassuming embroidery is communicating.

Petter Hellsing's work *Patched Up* is like a digital, movable patchwork quilt. He's created a rhythmic flow of documentary images from

cities in China, spread across a number of screens. The structures of the shifting, manipulated streetscapes, patterns, and colors that make you think of patchwork quilts where the offcuts from widely ranging sources are sorted into a new context, a new totality.

Den röda skymningens berg (The Mountain of the Red Twilight) by Margareta Gelin may also have its origins in China. The proportions of the weaving and the motif are like a classic Chinese ink painting, an abstract landscape that fades into the distance. The colors of the yarns are softly balanced, in mild, beautiful tones.

Lisskulla Lundqvist's tapestry *Prinsessan blek om nosen växer* (The Princess, Pale of Nose, Grows) has a more dramatic synopsis. There's hardly any information available on either the work or the artist, but the work is about an unborn child. Is it a dream, a nightmare, a miscarriage? NEJ (no) is written into the bottom edge. Hands stretch into the piece, to rescue? Maybe everything will work out, as the title suggests? This tapestry normally hangs at one of the offices of the Swedish Tax Agency.

The Swedish Police own another tapestry: a wild and stampeding horse in blue by Anita Ullerstam. How can a tapestry of a stylized horse head communicate so much vitality?

One three-dimensional work in painted bronze depicts some sort of balaclava. It's *Aktivist I* (Activist I) by Ludvig Ödman. The balaclava is a light-blue, striped rag rug. The piece conveys grassroots resistance. The bronze cast brings to mind a helmet, a rag-rug helmet.

The commission is palpable in some of the works, that is to say that the artwork has been created for a specific place, a specific context. This means big spaces, big walls, and artwork that is meant to be seen from a distance; perhaps a backdrop on which to rest one's eyes without breaking concentration from what's happening in the room. That's an art in and of itself: to create with a personal and interesting aesthetic, while subordinating yourself to the organization occupying the space.

Anita Graffman's *Det kommer en vår* (A Spring is Coming) is an example of this. A monumental weaving in three parts. From

Sandra Ikse*Tillit i ditt kaos* (Trust In Your Chaos), 1984**Esse McChesney***Mastektomi* (Mastectomy), 2020**Ludvig Ödman***Aktivist I*, (Activist I), 2018**Lisskulla Lundqvist***Prinsessan blek om nosen växer*
(The Princess, Pale of Nose, Grows), 1983

a distance, it makes for a calming landscape; close up, an impressionistic flickering. The differing perception from different distances is exciting, how the expression of the work shifts. It normally hangs in the National Courts Administration.

Another monumental work is an application by Gert and Birgitta Aspelin, normally hung in the Lower District Court in Halmstad.

**Anita Ullerstam***En vild och framrusande häst i blått*,
(a wild and stampeding horse in blue), 1976

The motif is a bit more dramatic, perhaps it is a landscape viewed from above. This work is best seen from afar.

Many, many more fantastic works can be seen in this well-curated exhibition. I haven't even named the performance works here, nor all the fine tapestries and works in adjacent practices. It's quite an experience on the whole, and an interesting survey of textile art from the last fifty years.

**Margareta Gelin***Den röda skymningens berg*, purchased 1981
(The Mountain of the Red Twilight)