

RAG RYA 2.0

VEGA MÄÄTTÄ SILTBERG IS BRINGING THE RAG RYA INTO THE FUTURE! IN HER ART PRACTICE, SHE WORKS WITH MATERIALS THAT MANY CONSIDER HAVE NO VALUE: REEDS IN A LAKE, PLASTIC WRAP THAT COVERED ROLLS OF FABRIC, OR SECOND-HAND CLOTHING. HER WEAVING CREATES A FORCE FIELD WHERE SOMETHING COMPLETELY UNIQUE CAN GROW.



Vega Määttä Siltberg

Textile artist based in Stockholm
 Education:
 2013–2016 BA in Textile art, Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm
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Founding member of Studio Supersju, p.15

Vega speaks about her art at vavmagasinet.se

More about Vega Määttä Siltberg in VÄV 2/18 and VÄV 3/23.

My first encounter with Vega Määttä Siltberg's work was at Konstfack in 2016, when she exhibited her Bachelor degree project *Vinterskörd*. The pieces were monumental weavings made of reeds in a beautiful graphic design. They occupied the room. She had harvested the reeds when the ice was still safe to walk on, and the shining stalks were woven into a contrasting warp and weft of dark wool yarn. This was an art practice that stood out from the rest. Inspiration came from her family in Finland, her maternal grandfather knew a lot about working with reeds.

– Weaving wasn't my focus while I was at Konstfack, but it was the technique that was best suited to how I wanted to use the reeds, she says.

She had previously made large quilts using used textiles her friends had given her, for example. Each donated garment had its individual history, and together they became a textile narrative in a new context.

– That's what I'm interested in. The change from the material and its own stories to then, through my process, different meetings happening between the material and what it has to say. There's a clear line between the reed works and what I'm working on now.

How can a process of creating new expressions look?

– It's a challenge to develop your style and find new expressions. Every now and then, maybe once a year, I think: I've got nothing to work on. And then other times, I all of a sudden have a new track. I'm beginning to get used to that continuing.

Like her glesryor.

– I wove samples in a very sparse weave, held them up to the light and saw what it could be—and continued.

And when her garments in rag rya were created.

– It happened when I manipulated the glesryor, folded and turned them, and got a feeling of how they would be as garments. I was in the fashion track in high school, and we got to do quite a bit of tailoring. These rya garments are simple in their construction. So I could make that work. The jacket and the vests can be worn but also can be seen as objects.

In 2016 she became a member of the newly formed weaving group Studio Supersju, and the fact that weaving became her focus is natural—all the other members are weavers.

We meet her in her studio just outside of Stockholm in Hägersten, which she shares with some of the other members of Studio Supersju. A sparse rag rya with knots of transparent plastic in glittering ribbons hang behind her loom alongside leftover yarns from other projects. A transformation, from something that could be considered trash, to something exclusive.

The sparsely-knotted rya works were shown at the Studio Supersju exhibition at the Malmsten Store on Strandvägen in Stockholm in the fall of 2019. One of them, called *Blommande, förmultnande* (Flowering, moldering) hung in one of the windows. The art object with thin fabrics knotted into a lattice of

Blooming, moldering. This piece is in a state somewhere between resplendent blooming and slow moldering.



Ryor

both in rags and yarn, have a history as warming bedspreads and later as rugs and as art on the wall. Early on, the fringe was the warming aspect and was turned toward the body.

Vega Määttä Siltbergs weaving has brought the rag rya into a new context. Her art is a way of pushing back against the disposable nature of fashion today, and showing that textile materials are valuable.

Snazzy, glittering plastic strips from a trip to Niagara Falls, yarns and rags from secondhand textiles, woven in the Moorman technique.

linen threads swayed, light as a feather. The light made its way between the thin fabrics.

– These came about when I was looking through second-hand clothing bins, searching for material. It was all seductive, flowery blouses in synthetic fabrics, beautiful and ugly at the same time. The colorways, but even the material in these floral fabrics, made for associations with Vanitas, the paintings of skulls and wilted flowers, motifs meant to remind us of the ephemerality of life.

She describes this as something between resplendent blooming and slow moldering. The linen yarns in each weaving are

ephemeral, whereas the synthetic fabrics are made of a material that are considered throwaway quality but that won't break down in nature.

– The duality is what interests me, and what I explore in my work with these different materials.

Is there an artist you're especially inspired by?

– El Anatsui, an artist from Ghana, is one. He makes gigantic works in which he joins masses of pieces of metal, like bottle caps or tin can lids, so that they form huge swaths of material that he can drape.

Vega Määttä Siltberg lived in New York

for a year, 2012–2013, and saw his work for the first time at the Brooklyn Museum.

– It fascinated me that this metal junk could be transformed into art thanks to the enormous scale and the repetition. It's something I think of often when I make my works of used materials. It may look tacky when you start weaving but if you keep going and let the work grow, the transformation from trash to art can take place.

Studio Supersju was founded in 2016. Since then, they've made an entrance onto the art scene, both as individual arts and as a group, and won awards and attention.



BENGT ARNE IGNELL

Textile upgrade: thin rags cut from secondhand clothing that may have only been used once.

My art is my way of pushing back against the disposable nature of textile production today, and showing that textile materials are valuable.

When they were finished with the weaving for the City Hall, she wanted to use the technique in her own way. Her first piece in Moorman was a commission for a private home. The next one is still in the loom. A small sketch attached to her loom shows a general sense of the composition and colors. Like mountain ridges or huge piles – “maybe dumps”, Vega interjects – fill a landscape. The details are decided while weaving. The crown of the “mountaintops” gleams in a clear blue. It’s material from blue disposable ponchos that she rescued after they were used and thrown away by a group of tourists. This work examines the meeting between the shiny, slightly glamorous plastic, and the rags.

Vega Määttä Siltberg’s work is exhibited until August 2024 at the Roslag Museum in Norrtälje. Historical rag ryor are shown side by side with her newly-woven rag ryor.

– It’s a very interesting context. When the older rag ryor were woven, the material was so valuable that every scrap of fabric was reused and woven into a warm rag rya. Today, we have such colossal amounts of textiles that are thrown away and that have no value at all; my art is my way of pushing back against the disposable nature of fashion today, and showing that textile materials are valuable.

Being a member of a group is a strength, says Vega. “We support each other and it can be easier to speak for all of us than when you’re just representing yourself.” In the culture section of the newspaper Dagens Nyheter (Jan 8, 2024), Karolina Modig writes about a new generation of weaving textile artists, and the six members of Studio Supersju are a part of that. And woven art is finding its place in the public sphere. This past summer, on the hundredth anniversary of the Stockholm City Hall, the group unveiled their collaborative weaving *Vakna, somna, vandra*, which is 470 x 210 cm. A contemporary work was added to the hundred-year-old building Ragnar Östberg created with a team of the most well-regarded artists of his time.

– It was the first time we’ve woven a work of art together. It was very rewarding. We used a sort of relay system of weaving, to which we added our individual skills in weaving, composition, and artistic interpretation.

The weaving technique used is Moorman, developed by Theo Moorman (1907–1990). The pattern picks are woven on top of a foundation of plainweave. Vega offers the mental image of moss growing on a rock. The technique offers free composition where the weft floats create shapes and structures.

